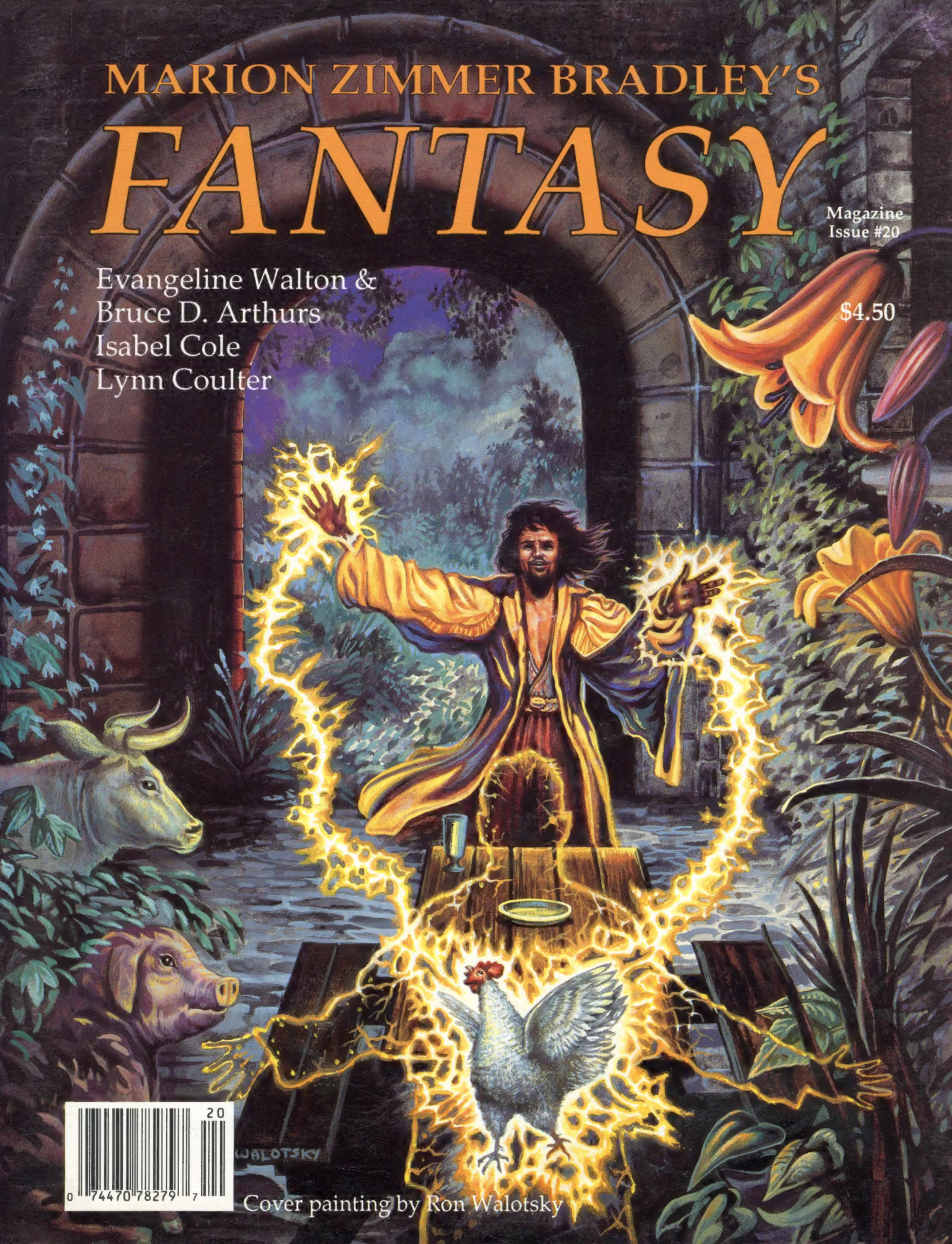
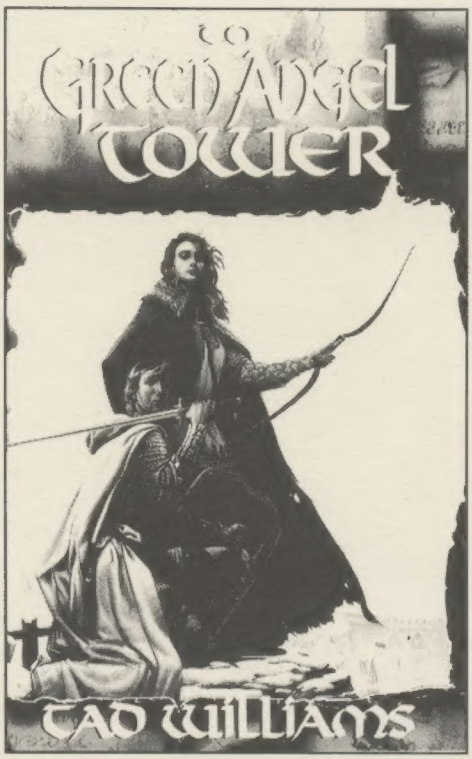

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S
FANTASY
Magazine
Issue #20
Evangeline Walton &
Bruce D. Arthurs
Isabel Cole
Lynn Coulter
$4.50
WALOTSKY
20
0 74470 78279 7
Cover painting by Ron Walotsky

The monumental finale to Tad Williams' bestselling masterwork,
MEMORY, SORROW AND THORN.



TO GREEN ANGEL TOWER

TAD WILLIAMS

TO GREEN ANGEL TOWER, the final volume in Tad Williams' bestselling masterwork *Memory, Sorrow and Thorn*, is a book which readers have been awaiting since the series made its phenomenal debut in 1988 with THE DRAGONBONE CHAIR. A novel of vast scope and unparalleled detail and complexity, TO GREEN ANGEL TOWER is a momentous tour-de-force finale to a groundbreaking series. Replete with war, deception, adventure, sorcery, and romance, TO GREEN ANGEL TOWER will more than fulfill readers' expectations, bringing this extraordinary epic to a stunning and surprising conclusion. In an unpredictable epic that is at times heartwarming, at times terrifying, and always mesmerizing, Tad Williams has painted a vision which will remain with the reader for a very long time. *Memory, Sorrow and Thorn* is destined to be one of the greatest works in the history of fantasy!

A *New York Times* Bestseller!

✣ **"A grand fantasy on a scale approaching Tolkien's *Lord Of The Rings*."**
—The Cincinnati Post

✣ **"Williams manages to add enough complexity and detail to his world to make that vital difference...this trilogy provides an epic fantasy you can get lost in for days,not just hours."** *—Locus*

✣ **"Panoramic, vigorous, often moving... Williams adroitly weaves together the tales...heralding a suitably epic and glorious conclusion."** *—Publishers Weekly*

For our complete Catalog listing hundreds of DAW titles in print, please write:

Elsie B. Wollheim
DAW Books, Inc.
375 Hudson Street
New York, NY 10014

Distributed by
PENGUIN USA—MASS MARKET

• Jacket art by Michael Whelan

0-88677-521-3/ORIGINAL HARDCOVER
$25.00 ($29.99 in Canada)

DAW FANTASY

EDITOR
Marion Zimmer Bradley

PUBLISHER
Rachel E. Holmen

DESIGN
Art Weller

CLERICAL ASSISTANCE
Heather Rose Jones
Raul Reyes

PROOFREADING
Gil Lamont
Debbie Notkin

Issue #20 – Summer 1993 – Vol. 5 No. 4

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S
FANTASY Magazine
ISSN 0897-9286
Marion Zimmer Bradley
P.O. Box 249
Berkeley, California 94701
(510) 644-9222

SUBMISSIONS:
Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine* welcomes free-lance submissions from people who have read our guidelines. All submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope with adequate return postage. *FANTASY Magazine*, a quarterly, publishes original all new short fiction with fantasy elements in the range of 500 to 6,000 words. The most suitable length and the one most often purchased is between 2,500 and 5,000 words. While every precaution will be taken, we cannot assume liability for unsolicited manuscripts. A duplicate should be retained. Sample copies of the magazine are available for writers and artists at a special rate of $4.00 including postage and handling. Requests for WRITERS' GUIDELINES should include a self-addressed stamped envelope.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:
All written comments, questions, and suggestions regarding any aspect of the magazine are read by our editor and are assumed to be intended for publication. We reserve the right to edit all submissions. Letters must include sender's name and address.

SUBSCRIPTIONS and BACK ISSUES:
Individual subscriptions are $16.00 for 4 issues in the U.S., $24.00 in Canada, $38.00 foreign subscriptions. All subscriptions, including Canadian, are payable directly in U.S. funds only. Individual copies of the current issue are $5.00 plus shipping. Shipping charges are $1.00 per copy in U.S., $2.00 in Canada, foreign $6.50. Back issues (#4 sold out) $4.95 each plus $2.50 per order shipping in U.S.

ADVERTISING:
Rates available on request.

BOOKSELLERS and SCHOOLS:
Discounts available. For information, call (510) 644-9222 or write to us.
Contents copyright © 1993 by Marion Zimmer Bradley
Third class postage paid at Berkeley, CA.

POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to:
Marion Zimmer Bradley
P.O. Box 249
Berkeley, CA 94701

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

FANTASY

Magazine

EDITORIAL

"Stroke your chins and swear by your beards that I am a knave."
"By our beards — if we had them — thou art."
"... But if you swear by that that is not, you are not forsworn."
— *William Shakespeare, AS YOU LIKE IT Act 1 Scene 2*

The quality of swearing has been eroded by inflation. When I was a little kid, a Tootsie roll three inches long cost a penny and "damn" or "hell" was pretty serious swearing, likely to get your mouth washed out with soap. Now kindergarten kids use words I didn't even know till my second marriage.

I have long been considered odd and even prissy for my dislike of carelessly used profanity or indecency. A young fan cornered me not long ago, and remonstrated with me in particular about my dislike of the word "fuck". When I said I disliked it because of its inexactitude, he pleaded passionately that that was just what was so great about it, that it could be used to mean absolutely anything. Well, I have made my living with words for many years and professionally dislike their misuse.

My thinking has been formed by a few special incidents.

My father could not get through a sentence without several dozen Anglo-Saxon crudities. Once when he had raved without stopping to breathe for several minutes, I commented that he was a foul-mouthed son-of-a-bitch. He looked at me, hurt, and commented angrily that there was "no need to insult his mother". Since I was fond of my grandmother I didn't pursue the topic.

When I was about fifteen, at the home of my uncle, the minister came to dinner to discuss my baptism. Uncle Fred dropped something hot and snapped, "Oh, the devil!" and then, quickly, "Excuse me, Father." Father Bob replied calmly, "I don't know about you, Freddie, but the devil is certainly not the Lord my God; you can take his name in vain all you please."

On another occasion I lost my temper at something or other and snapped, "Goddammit to hell!" Father Bob replied peacefully that it seemed somehow overkill to call down eternal punishment from the Lord for the equivalent of a run in my stocking when what I really meant was, "How very tiresome!"

I am not consciously self-censoring; I have simply trained myself not to think in those terms. Editors in the fifties were forced to censor manuscripts in a way that seems silly in the nineties. In my re-creation of the fifties world of the circus, I did use bad language sparingly for shock value. Having made the point that circus people, whose audience is mostly made up of children, seldom use bad language, it is all the more shocking when Tommy rips out furiously, "Fuck the whole damn circus if you want to, includin' the camels." And it is characteristic that Mario instantly reproves him, "Your father or Angelo hear you talking like that, don't come crying to me when you're pickin' up your teeth."

A woman who calls a man a "dirty brute" is saying something more meaningful about him than a stream of "motherfuckers" would. The latter does not literally imply that he broke the strongest taboo in the English language, while the former often means precisely what it says. "Motherfucker" means the exact equivalent of "Go to, thou varlet" — which itself means something equivalent to "Get lost, you so-and-so".

The most horrible curse I think I ever heard took place at a sixties party, where the late Tony Boucher, first editor of *F&SF Magazine*, well-known to be a pious Catholic, was faced with Anton LaVey holding forth on the virtues of Satanism. Tony, offended, listened patiently then commented quietly, "You, sir, are a damned fool; and I do mean damned." And one could tell that he really meant it. It was the only time I ever saw LaVey at a loss for words.

Marion Zimmer Bradley

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

FANTASY Magazine

Issue 20 Summer 1993

Page 6

Page 24

Cover Story

Cannibal Sorcerer 4

by Evangeline Walton and Bruce D. Arthurs; art by Ron Walotsky

Some sorcerers ar not the most pleasant of beings — on the other hand ...

Maiden, Are You Warm? 6

by Isabel Cole; art by Alicia Austin

A tale of two sisters and King Winter

An Affair of Wizards 14

by Jon C. Crusoe; art by George Barr

Some things are better than magic

Fire Man 19

by Lynn Coulter; art by Armand Cabrera

What price comes with the power of fire?

Page 41

Page 58

Trap-Tricker 24
by Julia S. Mandala; art by Barb Armata
Being a wizard is not necessarily safe

Daughter of the Blood 29
by Solange Wallace; art by Frank Kelly Freas
A gruesome little story about the price of magic

Naming the Number 36
by Kevin F. Kerr; art by Diana Harlan Stein
Magic seems as reasonable as one, two, three

The Bag 38
by Sabina Pinto; art by Michael Kucharski
The mystery of old age is always new

Roses 39
by Deborah Burros; art by Janet Kramer
Spectre de la rose?

Night Stand 41
by Frank Tuttle; art by Vincent DiFate
The world can be a very strange place

The Basilisk 46
by Lucy Cohen Schmeidler; art by Nicholas Jainschigg
Hunting a basilisk can have more dangers than the obvious ones

Redemption 55
by Sean Erik Ponce; art by Margaret Organ-Kean
A grim story of a man facing death — or is it?

The Two Princesses 58
by Feona Manning; art by Stan Bruns
How do you tell the real princess?

Things Man Was Never Meant to Know 62
by Stephanie Shaver; art by Allison Fiona Hershey
There really are such things

Regular Features

Marion Zimmer Bradley
Talks to Writers: Suspension of Disbelief 34
Writers Talk Back: Avoiding the Earthquake 35
by Lynne Armstrong-Jones
Results of the Cauldron 37
The Works of Marion Zimmer Bradley 54
Letters to the Editor 57
The Last Word 63
by Rachel E. Holmen
The Cauldron 64

Cannibal Sorcerer

by Evangeline Walton and Bruce D. Arthurs

Artwork by Ron Walotsky

Once upon a time there was a sorcerer who lived in a little house deep in the woods, far from any grocer or shopkeeper.

He turned leaves and flowers into food and ate them, but the plants were not very nourishing. He had never learned much about gardening or foraging, having spent all his youthful years studying necromancy, thaumaturgy, and other magical arts. So the plants he chose to turn into meat and drink lacked even the flavor or nutritional levels a well-thoughtout vegetarian diet might have.

"This will not do," he said to himself finally. "Plants are plants, and meat is meat. I want meat, real meat."

The sorcerer went into town and became friendly with a man he met there. "Come out to my cottage in the woods," he offered, "and I'll show you some fine entertainment."

The man agreed, and in the dark of a moonless night they returned to the little cottage in the forest. An owl was defecating down the chimney. A bat was sitting on the doorknob and screeching.

"Well, this does seem primitive," the guest said.

"Just wait 'til you get inside!" the sorcerer replied.

Once inside, the sorcerer turned the man into a chicken, then killed, plucked, gutted, fried and ate him.

Afterwards, the sorcerer smacked his lips, saying, "That was good! I was never cut out to be a vegetarian."

So henceforth he left the flowers and leaves alone and went to town regularly at mealtimes. He lured men, women, and children into the forest and turned them into cows, pigs and chickens. He ate the cows, pigs, and chickens.

The sorcerer did not really approve of cannibalism, but he felt that so long as he transformed his victims first, he was not doing any great harm.

"After all, I am only eating beef, pork, and chicken," he would say to himself at the end of a meal. He found this new diet very healthy, and was able to do better sorcery than ever before.

In the village, where everyone wondered what had become of their friends and relatives, they became pretty sure, as the number of disappearances increased, that it had been nothing good. One or two thought they remembered having seen some of the disappeared walking down the street with a strange man. But occasional strangers did come to town, and all this remained too vague a suspicion to pinpoint anyone specific.

But one girl, whose boyfriend had been one of the disappeared, had an idea. She went to her boyfriend's house, took his dog and a pair of dirty socks he had left behind, and trailed her lover into the forest. There she found the sorcerer's cottage, and also her young man's clothing in the rubbish heap.

She understood, then. She hid behind a tree that grew near the front door, and sent the dog to the door to bark. The sorcerer, annoyed, came to the door with the intention of transforming the dog into something that couldn't bark.

But when he opened the door, the dog sprang at his throat. The girl came from behind the tree and jumped into the fray as well, kicking and pummeling the sorcerer.

Finding it quite impossible to work magic while being assaulted from two sides, the sorcerer yelled out, "Let me go, and I'll give you anything in the world you want! I can do it! I'm a sorcerer!"

The girl, squeezing his throat with her arm, replied, "We can't trust you."

Gasping, he said, "I was a Boy Scout before I became a professional sorcerer! I can show you my merit badges in prestidigitation and levitation! You can trust me — Scout's Honor!"

So she did. The sorcerer invited her and the dog inside, where a fine meal was spread on the dining table.

The girl was hungry from her long walk into the forest and the excitement of the fight. She picked up a tidbit of meat from a tray and popped it into her mouth. She realized, as it went down her throat, where the meat must have come from. But by then it was too late; she had placed herself under the sorcerer's power.

The dog, seeing what was happening, sprang for the sorcerer's throat again. The sorcerer, moving quickly, snatched up another piece of meat from the table and tossed it at the dog. Instead of the sorcerer's throat, the dog's teeth snapped shut on the meat. Did the sorcerer then transform and eat the girl and the dog? He did not. He really had been a Boy Scout, and he had given Scout's Honor that they could trust him. He had not forced them to eat from his table, and it was not his fault that they now loved, rather than despised, him.

Indeed, the sorcerer and the girl became man and wife shortly thereafter. He transformed spider webs into a silken wedding gown, and a bunch of pig nuts into a diamond necklace for her.

The girl proved to be a very good wife. She planted an excellent garden next to the cottage; perhaps it was the bone meal sown into the ground that grew vegetables and fruits so well. She returned from town one day with a cage full of chickens and had the sorcerer transform an overgrown bush into a coop for them.

The dog came home one day with a rabbit dangling from his jaws. The girl made an excellent rabbit stew. The sorcerer, impressed, took up hunting with the dog, and soon brought meat home for the table almost daily.

"How strange," the sorcerer said to the girl one day many years later. "You came to stop me from devouring the nearby populace. By all judgments, you lost completely. And yet it has been years since anything other than unchanged meat has graced our table."

His wife smiled at him. "There is no strangeness about it, my husband. I sought you out because of my young love. When I married you and reformed your dining habits, it was because of my new love for you. Your powers were no match for that."

"Ahh," he replied, thoughtful. "I see that there are greater magics in this world than those I know."

❧

EVANGELINE WALTON was born in Indiana in 1907, but has long since moved to Arizona, where she lives with an orange tabby named Wioletta. Her best known books are a tetrology based on the Mabinogi, a cycle of medieval Welsh legends. Three bouts of major surgery have kept her away from writing for a while. "Cannibal Sorcerer" had its start as a computer exercise; something more stimulating than "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party." Bruce Arthurs convinced her to let him polish it up for publication.

BRUCE D. ARTHURS wrote "The Skycastle" in the first issue of MZBFM, stories in several of the Sword & Sorceress anthologies, an episode of STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION, and edited Copper Star, an original anthology for the 1991 World Fantasy Convention. He lives in Glendale, AZ, with his wife, son, and too many cats.

RON WALOTSKY has produced over 250 book covers both in and out of the sf field. He has shown his work in New York, as well as in many convention art shows. This year he has been nominated for a Hugo for Best Professional Artist and a Chesley for Lifetime Achievement.

Artwork by Alicia Austin

Maiden, Are You Warm?

by Isabel Cole

When I was four my father was lost in the forest and froze to death. It was not an uncommon way to die. We were well acquainted with the cold; for perhaps a few months of the year we could throw our hoods back without fearing our ears would freeze off. My mother had lost a finger and several toes to the gnawing of the cold. She was tough; we all had to be. We did what we could to live, and she always managed more. She was no longer either young or beautiful, but within a year she had remarried the richest and handsomest widower in the village. By rich I mean that there was a rug in his house which had come from two villages away, and there were a few glass windows; and by handsome I mean that his features were not unpleasing and were generally intact from frostbite.

His daughter, Bela, was two years older than I, and she was beautiful. I became acutely aware of this as we grew older. While I grew in all the normal ways, there was something blooming in her, a slender and delicate flower enfolding her with its petals. My hair was brown; hers was sable-black. My eyes were grey, like the eyes of nearly everyone else in the village; we watched for storm clouds so often that they had settled in our eyes. Her eyes were as green as the young tips of the fir-trees.

After some awkwardness my face and body were reaching a sturdy handsomeness which my mother had given me. When I was younger I thought, *Maybe I will look like Bela when I have finished growing.* I stopped far short of her beauty, and remained there, secretly hoping her perfect features would freeze off, one by one. I imagine now it would have made little difference if they had, for you will look at statues which have, over time, lost noses, ears, arms, and still call them beautiful. So would she have been, even had she dropped a little marble ear here, a frail white finger there. She might not have even felt it, lost in that cold eternal calm which statues know. I knew there was something different about her, besides her beauty, but for a long time no one would tell me the story about her; it was a strange tale, and few people liked to repeat it.

When Bela was little more than a year old, her mother had gone to visit her sister, a half-mile's journey through the forest. On the way she fell through the thin ice of a pond which lay in the forest some distance from the side of the road. No one had ever been able to explain why she had strayed from the road into the forest. Bela had been lying by the side of the pond for several hours, loosely wrapped in her swaddling blanket, when her father and the other men from the village came searching. She was sick with fever for many months, and when she was healthy again, she was very different from the other children.

She did little work. Her skin never was rough and red like mine. I helped my stepfather herd the goats through the forest, where they foraged under the snow. They had fine, thick coats of white wool, and were probably far warmer than I. Bela wandered the forest alone all day. I never saw her; I knew she followed secret paths to stay far away from people. She was touched, everyone said; by a god or a demon no one dared to guess. It seemed quite just to them, that after the gods had given her such a gift of beauty they took something in return.

When she first became my sister I was five and I worshipped her. I followed her everywhere, and she did not object to my company, possibly because she did not notice me. She did not look back at me, did not stop when I stumbled, and did not answer when I spoke. Only a few times did she speak, mysterious words falling out of a clear and empty silence, or look at me with her bright green eyes and her faint smile, or point out something which excited her and which I did not understand. She went quickly, untroubled by wind or ice. I followed, on my short legs, slipping and stumbling to catch up with her, even when she never glanced or spoke, for she was so much older and more beautiful than I, and so mysterious that I felt she was someday going to tell me a great secret.

I was given more chores, and she left every morning to wander without me. I was hurt, and asked her if she would not stay inside and play with me, or wait until I had finished my chores. The most reply I ever got was a faintly smiled, "No." Several times I ran out when my chores were done, and tried to catch up with her, but I never found her.

Once I ran deep into the forest, certain I had a glimpse of her. I sensed her quiet steps somewhere near me, and I called her name, but of course there was no answer. The night fell quickly and I was lost in the deep of the forest. I felt that I was not alone, that though I was sunk in the miles of cold and dark like a stone in a deep lake, I was following something. I remember very little of that night. At last my stepfather came looking for me and carried me home. Bela had been home for hours and was snug in bed asleep. I was sick for a week after that and thoroughly enjoyed the attention I received from my parents. I grew much wiser that week. I saw how gladly my parents turned their affection to me, who returned it much more readily than the silent Bela. I saw that if Bela did not need my worship, neither did I need her. They say the gods need us as we need them. If she did not need me or anyone, she was no god.

I was now the favorite of the family. After the night I tried to follow her, she surprised us by offering to herd the goats herself, and though her father did not trust her at first, she never lost one. Every day they returned wearier than usual, caked with snow and dark earth, but their milk was sweeter than before. Since I no longer herded the goats I rarely went into the forest, and never again had a glimpse of her at her wanderings, nor did I follow anything through the gnawing dark. I stayed in the house, making cheese from the goats' milk, spinning and dyeing their wool to weave our clothes. It was comforting, sitting in the warm house and helping my mother weave a wall against the cold. At night I stole glances at my reflection in the window pane. It was about this time I began to wish her face would freeze off. Someday the needles of the cold would penetrate deep enough and she would crack apart, leaving half a porcelain foot broken off in the snow, a smooth stiff hand nearby, her face delicately tinted and smiling, at rest in a snowdrift, like a doll I had seen once with a peddler. She always returned, leading the weary flock. If it was very cold and my parents expressed concern, she replied with a noncommittal smile. At night she embroidered, for her fingers did not grow stiff with the cold.

Sometimes she was very kind and thoughtful to me, sometimes very cruel. Sometimes I could not tell which she intended. She told me mysterious things about the forest, and I listened intently, still eager, as always, for a secret she might show me. It hurt my pride to pay attention to her, though, for it reminded me of the time I had worshipped her. I was sure she knew this and enjoyed my confusion. I began to avoid her, and soon even envy turned to indifference.

She was seventeen and not married, and that was a shame for us. Most women were married at fifteen, and I was seeking a husband myself. Again she became a curse to me, for the marriageable boys of the village were not of a sensible age, and once they saw my stepsister they were quite distracted from my modest charms. They knew she was mad, and they feared her a little, but they could not take their eyes from her when they saw her, and when she was gone her image danced in their eyes and hid me.

My mother, in whom thirty ten-month winters had left little intact but an instinct of survival, knew that if I were not married and pregnant within the year, I might as well be dead. She had a tremendous argument with my stepfather. He said it was customary anyway for the eldest daughter to be married first, and that when Bela was married it would be easier for me. He promised to have her married within a month.

Meanwhile I was still trying valiantly to win a husband. I planned carefully. One day, when Bela was away with the herd, my parents and I invited a boy for the customary visit. His name was Aud, he was handsome and well-to-do, and he had never seen Bela except from a distance; he seemed in fact to avoid her. During the fine meal my mother had prepared, and afterwards, as he talked to my parents and I wove industriously, he glanced at me shyly and even spoke to me, which was behavior strictly reserved for the second or third visit. Custom notwithstanding, my parents seemed relieved and let him talk to me. He even spoke of things besides the weather and the potato crops; I do not remember them now, for I was so flushed with victory I could see little more than his engaging blue eyes. We were all so caught up with hope that we did not notice how dark it was growing outside. The front door opened and slammed.

Aud stiffened, and with dismay I saw the embarrassment and fear in his face. He stood up quickly, mumbling apologies, and looked desperately for his coat, but before he could find it he looked up and saw Bela, whose return I had hoped he would miss. He stood still and slowly flushed. As the blood rose in his face, mine sank, leaving me cold.

"Well," said my mother, when his confusion became too obvious to be ignored, "Bela is also of marriageable age. In fact, it's better that the older sister is married first."

My eyes flew up to her in betrayal, but she was implacable. *After she is married, you can be married,* her eyes said. *Why the fuss?*

Then Aud's eyes met mine in bewildered apology for a second before returning to Bela. She sat demurely in a rocking chair, her nimble fingers busy with bright embroidery, her face intent, and blind to his suddenly hopeful gaze.

"Could I...?" he whispered, taking a step forward.

"If you choose her, you will be wed," said my stepfather. I turned my face away, only to meet my reflection in the window.

"Will you have me?" Aud said to her. She rocked silently. Her smile might have been coy, but I knew it was not, and I was cruelly glad. At her serene silence he relaxed, and asked her again, in a gentle, hushed voice, which had so recently been animated in friendly conversation with me.

She smiled, and he smiled. "No," she said. It was enough. It had all the gaping cold of seventeen years in the winter forest. He turned, struggled into his coat and boots, and left without another word. I ran to my room so Bela would not see me crying. She appeared intent on her embroidery.

Shortly, through my tears, I heard my mother yelling, and my stepfather joined in. I heard someone being hit, and knew it was Bela, but I was not comforted. They cared only that she had refused him, not that she had stolen him from me.

A sudden cold draft pulled through my room; the front door was open. I heard my mother's voice very clearly.

"Until you find a husband this door is closed! You may wed the Winter if you like."

The door slammed. I huddled for a moment in the silence that followed. I heard footsteps crunching in the snow outside, and ran to the door in my room that opened to the back of the house. I peered into the shadows and Bela stopped in a patch of moonlight to turn and look back at me. That look was as close to an apology as I ever got from her, but it was also angry, and glad, and determined, and as sad and empty as the wind. She disappeared into the forest.

I crawled back into bed, into the blankets which my body tried to warm. For a minute I imagined she could have crept

Artwork by Alicia Austin

back and hid in my room, under my bed, and we could have giggled and plotted like sisters. That thought passed, but so did my anger. I lay empty and sad. Suddenly I was very awake, and the cold of the room settled around me like a baby blanket I had known all my life. We knew Winter all our lives; why did we still fear it, why did it still command such a terrible awe, like a chasm or a deep lake on whose edge we clung, knowing the great rift of cold could swallow us without a thought? But it was so familiar, it touched me with such a knowing, almost comforting hand. My mother was weeping wearily in the next room, but I slept easily.

We were very quiet at breakfast the next morning. My mother and stepfather avoided each other's eyes. There was no sign of Bela. I was silent with the smugness in which children indulge themselves when their elders have been foolish. There was barely a word until my mother opened the front door to fetch some more wood, and screamed.

I had never heard her scream before. I ran to the door to have a look. Bela sat on the doorstep, stiff and still, wrapped in her cloak. Her eyes were open and filled with snow. Her skin was grey-white, her lips' red sucked away. My mother leaned against the door frame, shuddering. She had never intended, in all her anger, for Bela to freeze to death. Bela stared out into the forest, her drained lips smiling, snow drifting between them. I picked up her hand, her little bony wrist. It was so cold I was afraid my fingers would stick to it as to frozen metal, but there was something pushing faintly back. There was a pulse throbbing like water carving under ice. Although my fingers were numb, I was sure there was no warm blood in her to be felt.

"She's not dead," I said. "She has a pulse." My parents felt for themselves, then drew back.

"Well, let's get her inside," said my stepfather. He picked her up. She remained in the same pose, as stiff and ridiculous as a doll being carried about. He set her in a chair near the fire and took off her cloak.

She was covered with ice, encased in crystals like a string hung in sugar water. But it was not ice, for it did not melt, only clung to her, taking the fire's poor light and throwing it back at us in colors brighter than silk embroidery knots, sharper than gashing winds. I was terrified for a minute. Winter sat before our hearth, and did not melt, but shone its bright and bitter light as it did outside the windows. Then I saw that the crystals were sewn onto a long white shift she wore, twining in random patterns, spilling in glittering nets and ropes like a frozen waterfall. I imagined what it must be made of.

"Look at all that glass," breathed my mother, gazing into the nets of flashing facets. Bela moved, away from the fire, and it was as if a pine branch swayed in the wind, letting a spray of snow crystals fly across the light, spinning briefly in hectic, brilliant glee. Bela was still again. We took the crystal shift from her and put her in a great tub of warm water. At its touch, she screamed, writhing stiffly, like a doll undergoing the clumsy tortures of a child, and the water turned ice-cold. She sank down, contented.

We tried to make her go near the fire, but it began to die, and we left her to her own devices. She went into her room and

closed the door. It was so typical of her that it was almost comforting. She did not come to the midday meal. My stepfather, after building up the fire again, drove the goats out into the forest himself.

"She seems well," said my mother in an awkward silence.

"Aside from being cold, yes," I agreed.

"She seems almost happy," she said. There was something new in Bela, an infinite, untouchable content. I could hear the resentment in my mother's voice; what right did the mad have to be so happy? "Where did she find that dress? I've never seen anything so beautiful. Go, ask her where she got it," she said eagerly.

I knocked on Bela's door, wondering why my mother supposed my sister, drained at last of all pretense of life, would listen to me. She lay on her bed, delighting silently in the motionless turbulence of the crystals around her, her grey-blue veins channeling cold water from head to toe.

"Where did you get that?" I asked.

She turned her head, very slightly. Perhaps my sister of snow would answer me after all.

"In the forest," she said. Her voice was no longer lovely; it had lost its low richness. It whistled as if the forest wind blew through her mouth. The words were formed by branches and stone banks and the eternal muffling of the snow. "My wedding gift."

My mother was silent for a minute when I told her, and there was faint wonder, a gleam of hope in her usually impassive face. "She has been chosen by a god, then. I always suspected strange things in that forest. So she has only to step into the trees, and she has a king's ransom in glass? Will the gods give her the finer clothes as well as the finer face? Think how much there must be there, just for the taking!"

"You go find it, then," I said, uneasy at the way she was looking at me, and she slapped me for talking back.

"Do you want your sister to be always ahead of you?" she shouted. "Why don't you try to make something of yourself? Think of all the gifts you brought to the shrines, all the prayers you said while your sister was idling. You've worked hard all your life, do you like seeing your sister handed everything she wants? Think of her now, gloating over her little secret! If you can't do better than that half-wit, I'm ashamed to call you my daughter!" The old hunger in her voice was reawakened, as implacable as an oracle. "Go ahead," she said with a gentleness that made me edge away, She moved toward the door. "Don't worry. Nothing will happen to you. Look, no harm came to Bela. Think of those beautiful crystals, all that glass, like nothing you've ever seen..."

Before I knew it, the door had closed behind me, and I was locked out in a field of infinite lucid crystal. I had not even had time to take a shawl. Through the brilliant sunshine the wind swept as wildly as if light were kin not to heat but to cold. It was clear that I was going to go out into the forest; I saw no reason to deny it. I went around the back of the house. Bela stood in the door of my room.

I was determined not to see her, but, as always, it was impossible. All over her the icy nets dazzled in the sun. She no longer belonged to the house in whose doorway she stood. I came up to her and waited, as I had so often done, for her to tell me something.

"You can have a dress like mine, too," she said. "You will come to no harm if you do not affront. You need only yield. If you consent, you will have my luck." Her voice was a conspiratorial whisper, and I had to lean forward, half-unwilling, to hear it. "Now you can be wed, like me," she said. She tossed me her cloak with mimed scorn, but there was nothing in her face at all. What she had neglected all her life, she had gotten rid of now. I glanced back at her as I hurried off into the woods, and remembered the look she had given me the night before, a confusion of emotions which were now resolved.

I was sure I was not meant to come out of the forest alive anyway, so I left all the ways I knew far behind. In the forest a hidden desire always woke, a faint yearning to wander away, to be lost far back in the woods where no one ever came. Of course, if you did that, you would die, but you never really believed that. You thought you would find something, as if, far enough out there, a secret of Winter lay for the finding. We would not have feared the forest so much if it had not been on such intimate terms with those regions of the mind through which only Bela traveled at ease. I remembered rumors, and things half-mentioned in tales; they were never dwelt on, for they were both too terrible and too close. One knew them without being told. People said there was some hungry thing in the forest that would eat you without mouth or tongue or teeth.

At last my resolve died, and I stopped in a glade I had never seen before. The eerie wonder that had driven me had vanished, leaving a thin childish voice. I was tired, I was hungry, my nose was running, I was lost. Every childish spite I had ever been ashamed to feel, I felt now. If I died, they would be sorry. Maybe Bela would be sorry. Maybe they would punish her. I remembered the time I had followed her into the woods, and my stepfather had come to find me in the maze of frozen darkness. That was too long ago for me still to be a child.

I wiped my nose and walked on, my numb feet ringing, and some part of my mind was seduced by the brilliant white on black beauty of the forest. The forest gnawed at me, peeling me away in bright layers, and everything became clearer and clearer. I imagined it was so beautiful out here because no one who reached it would ever live to see anything else. The light stabbed up from the snow and the cold stabbed in between the trees, and I felt that all the Winter was fixed on me, making bitter love to me.

The light went under, and the snow was briefly red and gold. Color seemed wrong here, a faint cry from some distant place where there was heat. When the light was gone, the Winter ceased to favor me with its bright barbs and left me its void. I sank down under a tree. There was no point in going further, so I would wait. I closed my eyes so I would be in my own darkness.

I opened my eyes and they were still full of the black night. Then, slowly, a faint line of light appeared through the night, and another, straight, fine, and sharp, splitting the night apart, gathering into a column of fractured light like a formation of hair-thin crystals. I tried to move, but I was stiff and frozen. I wanted to touch the light and see if it would draw blood, for it looked so sharp and brittle. The thousand crystals of light drew their lines together and became a man.

He glittered like snow, or like a statue of crystal-shot stone. His hair was as pale as the ever-distant Sun, and his eyes were the blue that hides deep in ice and high in the sky and in shadows on snow. I had always trusted that light was warm, close up; his light broke away the darkness and fell upon me, and it was colder. I shuddered, as if I were losing a last hope. He came toward me, and his graceful still body made a faint ringing. I thought it was the snow crystals singing under his feet.

He stood in front of me and smiled. His lips were translucent as quartz. There was no warmth there, only a flash of the wild bright reaches of the Winter. There was faint, hectic color in his cheeks.

"Pretty maiden," he said, his voice splitting the night into a thousand bell-like tones of snow and ice, creaking trees and hidden water. "Do you know who I am?"

There was a cold little hand on mine, tugging me up into an ecstatic calm, with Bela's words whispering eagerly: consent, yield, do not affront. A foreign voice whistled out of my lips, "All hail, King Winter."

"You have a civil tongue in your head," he said, well pleased. I felt a childish surge of pleasure at his approving smile. I wanted to smile back, but my mouth would no longer move. I was waiting for something to move through me. He regarded me as if I lay in a soft bed in a fine curtained room that was his gift to me. He smiled solicitously. "Maiden, are you warm?"

I felt so clear and filled with light. I thought I was cold; I could be wrong. I felt nothing now. Cold was a vulgar word here, an itchy nasty word sure to offend him, and if I shed it I would be touched by the immense hope around. If I gave the right answer he would not leave me alone in the darkness that he had turned soft about me, like velvet. I sought the correct word.

I breathed out, and the steam of my breath blurred his face and died. "I'm cold," I said bitterly.

His face sharpened, its lines of light stabbing out like darts. "Did your mother never teach you to speak civil?" he said reprovingly. I flushed, and clamped my teeth on my tongue to keep it in its proper place. My years of training in nodding, smiling, averting my eyes, nicely biting back objections, had been wasted. "Why so ungrateful? I have given you your whole world. Perhaps you are mistaken," he continued gently. "Consider."

The forest was brighter than day, bright as a furnace. If I could name that brightness it would take me in its arms. He knelt by me expectantly. "You know," he said, "I have seen many people, and none of them understand — that I can give them anything they want." His voice was building a glass palace around us. It tinkled alluringly in a mild breeze.

"I'm cold," I said, my jaws almost too stiff to move.

He was on his feet again, dodging the path of the harsh word as it flew out of my mouth. "Why is it so hard for you?" he said sorrowfully. "Why do you always resist? Why do you turn away and hide from me?" His voice cut into me as I drew breath, distant and mournful and tantalizing as the depths of the forest that could only be reached once. The color in his cheeks guttered like a flame. Whenever it died he was not so beautiful anymore. It occurred to me that he had the pallor of a very hungry person.

"It's true," I said, picking my words with some difficulty out of the great mild numbness. "I'm cold."

He stood silently, but he changed until I became aware that a wrath of unguessable heights was gathering before me. Arches of bright glass split and shattered, and the air hissed and whistled as if arrows and daggers were flying past, tearing the forest to rags, opening up the gaping sky. The light left me, and I was slowing, breath and heart and thought, so that the gnawing pains had time to grow slowly, pressing a sharp web of crystals through my limbs. I could feel the sharp edges prickling and tearing unbearably. When they reached my head King Winter would not turn them into palaces for me. I was conscious of thousands of miles of Winter all around, swept clean by a consuming wind, and somewhere in the middle I was sinking in the spinning bright-eyed night, dizzy but unable to move.

Then everything was still and the light had returned. It rocked me gently like a mild sea, and I drowsed, stretching languorously. I was a Queen, reclining in a satin disarray of veils and cushions, in a room flooded with this pure and living light. About me were mazes of tall twining silver pillars, rising from the soft undulating floor to the glass panes of the roof, through which the blue sky was brilliant. Between the pillars was a garden of glass. Pleasant whispers rose as the breeze brushed over the swells of the white ground, and water laughed, and the pillars swayed.

King Winter sat in the soft drifts before me, translucent. I was wearing nothing but a web of crystals, as bright and clear as a wave breaking over me. I was not cold in my transparent attire, though I remembered the biting pain vividly, but I blushed.

"Now you are warm," he said. The blush had not colored my skin at all. I was as white as a statue. He was beautiful, too, unmarred by any tint.

"Yes," I said. My voice whispered as prettily as the wind. I could shriek like the wind, too, chasing with it, cracking the branches, tearing off shutters, sweeping up drifts, throwing down the tempests of snow. I would feel only the wild speed. Bela would be there, too. This was her secret.

The nets were cold on my skin. I feared they would melt, run away in beads and leave me bare. King Winter smiled, showing his sharp white teeth. His crystalline voice spilled out, flashing its facets in the air. It was so insubstantial I felt that if I moved it would disappear like a trick of the light. "When you are my bride all this will be yours."

I was shivering, hot and cold, and my skin prickled from white to red and back again. The crystals began to melt and tremble on my skin. He reached out his hand to still my shuddering. The touch, I knew, would burn for an instant, and then I would be tranquil and composed in nets of light and crystals. I would sit on the doorstep staring with clear and snow-filled eyes into the forest, and the house would burn me like an oven.

"You are already wed," I said. He drew back his hand before it touched me, and stood up. He was sharp-edged, jagged, fracturing the light to hurt my eyes.

"She broke her silence," he spat. "She told?" He gathered in the shattering light and swept far, far up with a thin howling shriek which broke apart the last of the calm. The crystals meshing my flesh rose up and tore out to follow him.

The light was early morning, and I ached from the work the crystals had done trying to push their brittle points through my veins. Now the pain was my blood's insistent throbbing, bringing tears to my eyes, but I liked this pain. It made me angry; it made me certain I would find the way back. I stood up with some difficulty and stamped my feet to help the blood on its tortuous journey. I hurried through the forest, eyes intent on the path, for my feet were clumsy. I had no more taste for the glass gardens around me. To find my way out of the magic realm, I followed the shrill angry cries of King Winter. The echoes hung quivering from every tree. He was going to Bela.

I had been walking barely an hour when I came to the end of the forest and saw my house. I had thought I was hundreds of miles away from everything, but here the house had been standing all along, casting lamplight across the snow and smoke across the sky.

Aud stood in the road by a sleigh. I greeted him with lofty nonchalance; after King Winter, Aud seemed like a little boy to me. He mumbled a sheepish reply.

Artwork by Alicia Austin

"What are you doing here?" I asked conversationally.

He hung his head but answered with ready candor, "I came to see Bela."

"Oh? And how is she?"

"She's dead," he said. He lifted his face and met my eyes. Behind the confusion and the customary sympathy, I saw distinct relief. "Were you really in the forest all night?" he said, awed. He looked at me as if at a stranger, wondering what mystery and knowledge they hide.

"I guess so," I said. He offered me his coat as we walked toward the house.

As I opened the door my mother rushed at me from the hearth, embracing me and talking incoherently. I waited until she fell back, and then I went into Bela's room.

Bela lay on the bed in her crystal dress. Her eyes were closed, and her mouth was a fierce thin smile, as if when King Winter came she had swiftly risen out to meet him, and pursued him yet. I picked up her wrist, and even the cold pulse was gone.

I took the crystal dress off her and wrapped her in the brightly embroidered funeral cloth which was made for each person at birth. I arranged her in the bed and set candles around her in the proper fashion. Something about those age-old rites, with which a thousand ancestors had been sent off on their last journeys — I, too, might end ringed with candles and wrapped in embroidery in this very room — made me certain that I was going to take a different journey. The dead were very close to us; even with their long journey, they were unable to escape very far. I was going to go as far away as possible.

I put the crystal dress in a large bag and added some clothes of my own, a few necessities, and some food from the larder. My parents followed me without a word as I made my preparations. My mother knew when to give up. She was crying a little. I put on my coat, gave Aud's coat back to him, and shouldered my bag.

"Good-bye," I said to my parents, and hugged them, nicely if a bit coldly, and walked out the door. Aud followed me to the road, frowning but not daring to say anything.

"Is that your sleigh?" I asked. It was beautiful, red and black, with a grey horse drawing it and breathing great plumes of steam.

"Yes," he said, somewhat surprised. "My father gave it to me for my birthday."

I looked at it critically. Aud had no idea what I intended with it. In twenty years he would be old, and his face would have been nibbled away by the wind. When he died he would fly up from the surrounding candles, circle the village a few times, and settle on a chimney or a snowy branch, staring mournfully at the unnegotiable forest.

Glowing with this sudden pity for him, I decided to share a secret. I dug in my bag and held an edge of the crystal dress to the light. "Glass!" he breathed, awed.

"Glass, nothing! These are hard as rocks. They're diamonds. I've heard of diamonds. Glass! There are places, far away, where all the windows are made of glass, where people eat off glass and drink out of glass." He stared at me. "Listen," I said eagerly. He did not have to stay here. "Do you want to get out of here? Let's take your sleigh and go as far as we can."

He was silent and did not seem to

understand. I began to lose interest in him. It would be a shame to go alone, but if he was content here, I did not need his company. "If you don't want to go, I'll buy the sleigh from you and go alone," I added with some disappointment.

There was a timid flash of understanding in his eyes. I had not been wrong. As soon as he was sure I was not joking, he smiled, climbed into the sleigh, and gave me his hand to help me up. I had chosen a good companion for this long journey. Someday, in a place so warm the sun filled half the sky, I would tell him about King Winter and the web of crystals which my blush had melted even in the sweet cold. Or perhaps he would have seen that by then.

"We'll go south," I told him as the horse trotted forward and the wind jumped into my face. The sleigh bells rang clamorously to announce our escape. "Where it's warm."

"South," he agreed, and the pine trees rushed backward on either side, and the wind swept over us, almost drowned in the bells' wild chiming, speaking a foreign voice.

❧

Isabel Cole, when last heard from a year ago, had just begun studying at the University of Chicago and was beginning to cope with college's trials and temptations (the library — what did you think we meant?). She hasn't sent us more recent information so you'll have to extrapolate for yourselves.

Alicia Austin was the artist we first thought of when we read this story. Her exquisite art is frequently inspired by myth and folklore from cultures throughout the world and will be displayed prominently at the 1993 WorldCon where she will be the Artist Guest of Honor. She and her business partner, Jinx Beers, run Fantasies Unlimited, a studio which publishes Alicia's cards, limited-edition prints, and other artwork.

The Bakery Men Don't See

A cookbook to raise money for the James Tiptree, Jr., Memorial Award: $10 per copy plus postage ($1 North American, $3 other)

Make checks payable to SF3 and send to Box 1624, Madison WI 53701-1624.

BACK ISSUE ORDER FORM

___ Issue #1 (Summer 1988) – *Imagination and Reason* - Poul Anderson. *The Skycastle* - cover story by Bruce D. Arthurs; cover art by George Barr. *The Final Bet* - Marion Zimmer Bradley. *Final Exam* - Jennifer Roberson.

___ Issue #2 (Fall 1988) – *The Hitchhiker* - Jayge Carr. *Bone Serai* - cover story by Susan Shwartz; cover art by George Barr.

___ Issue #3 (Winter, 1989) *** WE FOUND A BUNCH OF THESE IN STORAGE — THEY'RE NOT SOLD OUT AFTER ALL!!! NOT YET....*** *The Adinkra Cloth* (a Nebula finalist!) - Mary C. Aldridge.

Issue #4 **SOLD OUT** (Really.)

___ Issue #5 (Summer, 1989) – "The Dragon Issue" *Do Virgins Taste Better?* - Deborah Millitello. *Dragon Three Two Niner* - Peter L. Manly. *The Dragon, the Unicorn and the Teddy Bear* - Phyllis Ann Karr. Cover art by George Barr.

___ Issue #6 (Fall, 1989)– *Nightside* - Mercedes Lackey. *Aventura* - Jacqueline Lichtenberg. *The Book of Souls* - cover story by Jason Van Hollander; Chesley-Award-winning cover art by Frank Kelly Freas and Laura Brodian Kelly-Freas.

___ Issue #7 (Winter 1990) – *Daughter of the Oak* - David M. Shea. *The Hall of the Winter Folk* - cover story by Stephen C. Fisher.

___ Issue #8 (Spring 1990) "Science-Fiction/Fantasy" Issue *Change* - cover story by Jo Clayton; cover art by James Balkovek.

___ Issue #9 (Summer 1990) "Short-Short" Issue Forty stories, PLUS articles! Short-shorts by Lackey, MZB, Paxson, Hodges, Schweitzer, Waters, Rosen, Huebner, and a host of others!

___ Issue #10 (Fall 1990) –*Satanic, Versus...* - Mercedes Lackey. *What a Wizard Does* - Janet Kagan. *Vassilissa the Fair* - Micole Sudberg.

___ Issue #11 (Winter 1991) – *Brontharn* - cover story and cover art by George Barr. *Be It Ever So Humble* –Tanya Huff. *Footsteps* - Marion Zimmer Bradley. *The Robber Girl, the Sea Witch, and the Little Mermaid's Voice* - Phyllis Ann Karr.

___ Issue #12 (Spring 1991) – *The Connecticut Eskimo* - Madeleine L'Engle. *Sunrise* - Leslie Miller. *The Girl* - Donald Backman.

___ Issue #13 (Spring 1991) – *Haute-Clare* - cover story by eluki bes shahar; cover art by Frank Kelly Freas. *According To Custom* - G.E. Gaines.

___ Issue #14 (Fall 1991) – *Black Ribbon* - Dawn Albright; cover by Gail Butler. *The Tengu's Scroll* - Dana Kramer-Rolls. *The Wuzzles* - M. Z. Bradley.

___ Issue #15 (Winter 1991) – *Issue in honor of Fritz Leiber;* includes article by Leiber and interview. *Queen of Summer Forests* - Isabel Cole. *To Be the Best* - Margarita Serbia. *All's Fair* - G.E. Gaines.

___ Issue #16 (Spring-Summer 1992) – *Never Look at a Gift Sword in the Horse's Mouth* - Jennifer Roberson; cover by Alan Gutierrez. *The Contract*- Isabel Cole. *Lessons in the Dark* - Sandra C. Morrese. *Interview with Lois McMaster Bujold.*

___ Issue #17 (Fall 1992) – *Pandemonium* - Sue Young Wilson; cover by George Barr. *The White Snake* - Mara Grey. *Riddle Trial* - Deborah Burros.

___ Issue #18 (Winter 1992) – *Arakney's Web* - Jo Clayton; cover by Nick Jainschigg. *The Black Tower* - Laura Underwood. *The Witch's Child* - Patricia Duffy Novak. *Queeneyes* - eluki bes shahar.

___ Issue #19 (Spring 1993) – *Dreambridge* - Janny Wurts; beautiful wrap-cover. *The Erin Cory* - Rebecca Lyons. *The Theban Fix* - Karen Anderson. *Mad Sally* - Patricia Duffy Novak. Interview with Mercedes Lackey.

Mercedes Lackey Special: Issues 6, 9, 10, 12,19: $18.00 postpaid.

Full set of all back issues #1 to #16: $100.00. Autographed: $150.00. Postage paid.

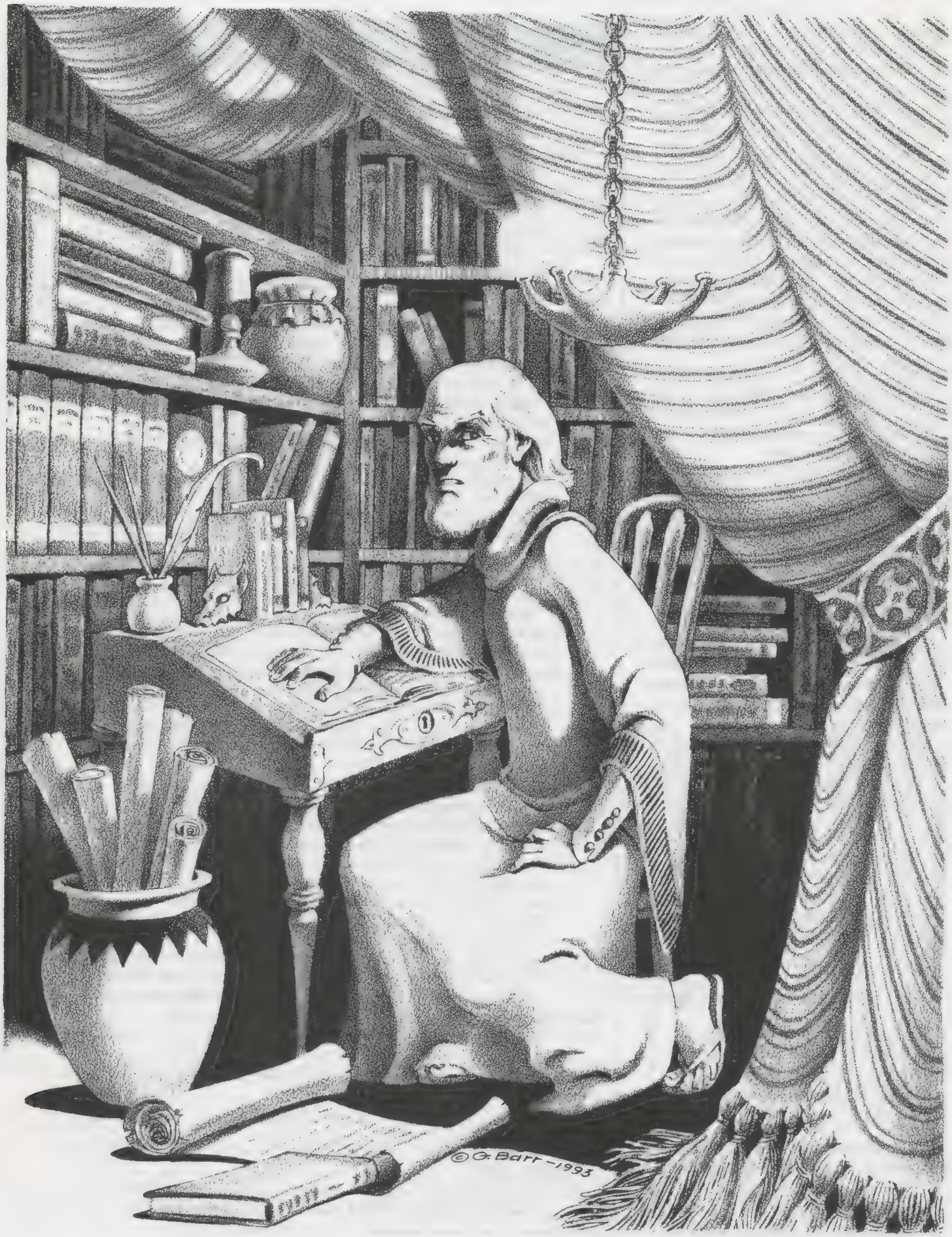
Get these back issues while they last! Enclose $4.95 for each back issue, plus $2.50 postage *per order* (NOT per issue!).

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Please enclose check or money order in U.S. currency and **make payable to Marion Zimmer Bradley. Send to P.O. Box 249, Berkeley, CA 94701.**


©G. Barr -1993

An Affair of Wizards

by Jon C. Crusoe

Soreto had just paid for his order — dried herbs, powdered cobra venom, and a dozen red spiders of a very special type — when he heard the screams. As he identified the voice, he lifted the hem of his robe and ran out of the cramped wizard's supply shop and into the market. A crowd was gathered around Old Tenna's booth, and he had to push his way through to reach the aged weaver.

Tenna lay curled on her side, moaning as she held her hands over her eyes. As Soreto knelt next to her and put a hand on her shoulder, the people began to edge back, having recognized the small, gray-bearded man's robe as that of a master wizard. He lifted Tenna to sit on a bale of cloth and supported her with an arm around her shoulders.

"Tenna, what's happened here? Can you tell me?"

"Who– who be that speaking?" whimpered the elderly woman.

"It's Soreto, Tenna." He kept his voice calm as he tried to ease her panic. "Come now, tell me what happened."

"Oh, Master Soreto, it were horrible!" Tenna still kept her hands over her eyes. "I were speaking to some stranger what came through looking for you. And when I told him of all the good what you had done, he just laughed." Her voice lowered. "And then he said that if you had the courage to be meeting him at your house tomorrow, that he'd be taking his curse off me. He swore God-Oath to it!"

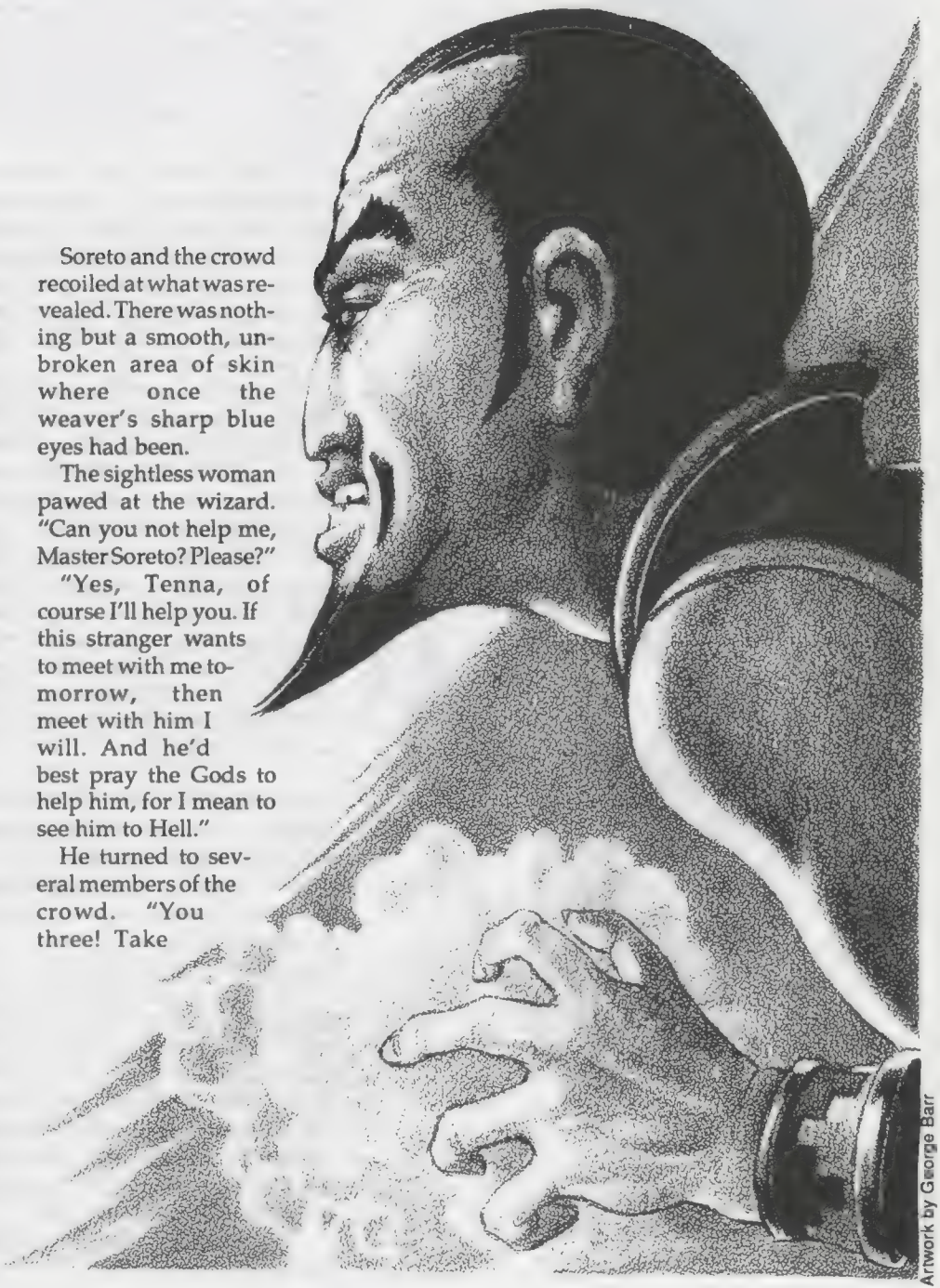
"Curse, Tenna? What curse? Take away your hands and let me see."

Soreto and the crowd recoiled at what was revealed. There was nothing but a smooth, unbroken area of skin where once the weaver's sharp blue eyes had been.

The sightless woman pawed at the wizard. "Can you not help me, Master Soreto? Please?"

"Yes, Tenna, of course I'll help you. If this stranger wants to meet with me tomorrow, then meet with him I will. And he'd best pray the Gods to help him, for I mean to see him to Hell."

He turned to several members of the crowd. "You three! Take



Artwork by George Barr

Tenna to the Wyvern's Inn at the edge of the Wizard's Quarter. Tell Canto the innkeeper that I asked that he and his wife take care of her." As those chosen helped the blind, white-haired woman to her feet, Soreto looked at her with gray, winter-cold eyes. "Don't be afraid, Tenna. I promise you that you *will* see again." Soreto wheeled and strode away, his angry boots kicking up dust from the square.

As he approached the Wizard's Quarter, the mage found that word of the incident had flown ahead of him. No one stood in his path as he silently stalked through the narrow streets. The only one who even dared delay him was the innkeeper, Canto, who was pacing back and forth in front of the door to Soreto's house.

"Master Soreto!" The big man jumped as he turned around to find the wizard standing there. "You fair gave me a fright! I'd done heard that there be trouble in the market and that you be wantin' to see me. Be there somethin' that Marta and I can help you with?"

"No, good Canto. What's happened cannot be changed by your strength or Marta's kindness. Tenna's been blinded by a spell, and I mean to see it removed. I sent her to your inn until tomorrow. " The wizard turned to his door and on it sketched a complicated sigil with his finger. "I *will* need a favor from you in the morning, my friend. Will you be good enough to bring my breakfast porridge up to me? I'm expecting a visitor that I would be loath to miss."

No sooner had the rainy dawn broken over the Wizard's Quarter than Canto came up the hill with a covered bowl and a worried look. The door of Soreto's house opened to his knock, and he heard the wizard's voice invite him in.

"Ah! You remembered to bring my breakfast, old friend." Soreto took the bowl, lifted the cloth cover, and inhaled the rising steam. He sighed with satisfaction and carefully replaced the covering before setting the bowl aside. "How is Tenna doing this morning, Canto? Is she comfortable at the inn?"

"She be doin' fine, Master Soreto. There be some who want to come round just to be gawkin' at her, but me and Marta been keepin' them out." The big innkeeper looked smug as he announced, "And while I be up here, I got the Erkin brothers watchin' out for trouble with those big clubs they carry. But the whole town sure be a-talkin' about what be going on."

"And the odds are merchants are probably doing their best business in years," Soreto commented in a wry tone. "But there's another reason that I wanted you to come up here this morning." He took a small scroll from his belt and handed it to Canto. "This is my will, naming you as my heir. It may be that I won't come through this, and I want you and Marta to have my belongings and money. I only want your promise that you will care for Tenna if this stranger breaks his oath to lift his spell."

"Don't you be speakin' so, Master Soreto. I've seen you do spells that no one else can cast." Canto's voice took on an excited note. "You could use that spell what you used on that thief at my inn! You know, the one that put him kickin' on the floor as he strangled hisself!"

A flicker of embarrassment glinted in Soreto's eyes. His face puckered in a sour grimace as he took the man's arm. "If you're going to be my heir, I'd best explain a few things to you." He drew Canto close and whispered into his ear. When he finished, the innkeeper jerked back in shock. "Now," continued the wizard, "you know why I can't use that spell on another magician."

"Well then, I could get some folks together. And when this strange wizard comes walkin' up, we could fix it so he wouldn't be botherin' you no more."

"And leave Tenna blind? No, Canto, I think not." Soreto held his hand out to the big man and opened the door to the street. "Best you go now, old friend. I still have some preparations to make."

After Canto left, the mage moved through the corridors of his house. Occasionally he stopped to touch this point or that, or to run his hands around a doorway, or to turn a projection here or there. Finally arriving at the door to his study, he paused and thought back over all

his preparations. Satisfied that his traps and defenses were ready for his visitor, Soreto sat down to wait.

It was midafternoon when the lemon-faced stranger arrived. He opened the front door and passed through it and the rest of Soreto's traps as though they didn't exist. Working his way through the house, he sneered at the apparent lack of defenses as he knocked on the door of Soreto's study.

"Enter if you wish to," came Soreto's spiritless voice. "The door isn't locked."

The newcomer eased the door open and looked into the room. Soreto was sitting at his writing desk in a small alcove. The man entered and was motioned to an overstuffed chair by the fire. Before sitting, the stranger looked around the room again. There were no traps evident even in this room, nor was Soreto guarded in any way that he could detect.

"Are you so resigned to your fate then, old man? Are you *really* so ready to die?"

Soreto waved a negligent hand. "I really care very little about what happens to me today. I care only that you keep your promise about Tenna. Restore her sight and when we get on with this little game of yours — well, I won't try to resist."

"Do you really think you *could*? Face facts, old man. You're little more than some hedge wizard, doing tricks and minor spells for whatever peasants will pay you in chickens and corn. You're nothing!" He smirked as he settled himself into the chair, twisting back and forth to find the most comfortable position. "And the woman? I don't care one way or the other about the woman. She was just a pawn, a tool to keep you where I could find you. But," he quoted, *"a promise given is a pact made."* The strange wizard sketched a glowing symbol in the air. "There! The spell on the weaver is removed." His voice became heavy with sarcasm. "Now, have you any other, any *final* requests?"

"Just two," Soreto stated, his eyes cold. "First, will you tell me who the devil you are?"

"My name is Chalek. That is really all you need know. And if you want a second favor, ask it quickly. My time here must not be long."

"I want to know your reasons for all this," said Soreto. "What set you after me? I don't know you. I don't even know anything *about* you."

Chalek began shouting in a sudden mad rage. "No! You *don't* know me! But you knew my brother, all right! You knew him well enough to kill him!"

He had risen half out of his chair as he screamed at Soreto. Now he sat again, smiled, and crossed his legs, apparently regaining his poise and nonchalance.

"He was very young," Chalek continued, as if the episode of madness had never occurred. "Too young to know that he was breaking into the home of a wizard. The pet demon that I've heard you keep here killed and mangled him almost beyond recognition. There was almost nothing for us to claim for burial."

"Was this about eight months ago, during the Feast of Fools?" At Chalek's nod, Soreto smiled with satisfaction. "Then your pig of a brother wasn't only guilty of attempted robbery but was wanted for the rape and murder of a ten-year-old girl. There's not a person in this city but would agree that I did the public a major service by killing the little turd."

Chalek began screaming again, incoherent in his anger. He raised his hand in a curious way and shouted a phrase that seemed almost impossible for a human throat to make. Wisps of green fog began to gather around Soreto in his alcove and he quickly became obscured from view.

Chalek began dancing as he raved, "Go on and breathe, *Master* Soreto. Breathe it in and die!"

After a moment, the fog cleared away as if it had never existed. To Chalek's amazement, Soreto still sat on his writing stool and said, "Thank you for the offer, but I decided not to die after all."

Chalek sat stunned. No one could protect himself from *that* spell. No one!

Nevertheless, Soreto was still alive as he made a slight gesture at Chalek, who began feeling as though his skin was alive with insects. The crawling sensation be-

Artwork by George Barr

came pain, became agony, became hellfire! He couldn't move, and everything was getting darker. His body began to twist and contort itself in the same way his brother's had eight months before. And as he had done with Chalek's brother, Soreto approached the dying man to speak to him in a low voice.

Artwork by George Barr

Heading toward the Wyvern's Inn, Soreto hadn't taken more than six steps when Canto, a crossbow over his shoulder, fell into step beside him. Neither man said a word as they walked down the street, but Soreto's eyes picked out figures on the rooftops and in the alleys and alcoves along the way.

Looking closely, Soreto made out Tenna's grandson and his friends putting down the large rocks they had evidently planned to drop from the roof. Further along, a certain shopowner who dealt in spiders and magical supplies was seen paying off two large mercenaries. In an alleyway, a squad of city guardsmen, those assigned to keeping order in the marketplace, sheathed their swords as they grinned and nodded to the wizard. It was the same all along the way to the inn. The common people of the city, with whatever weapons and tools they owned, had gathered to waylay Chalek as he left Soreto's house.

The wizard found that he had to swallow to clear the large lump that had suddenly appeared in his throat. "*All* these people, Canto? They all came because of *me*?"

"Aye, and more folks that you *didn't* see! We took up our places as soon as Tenna's eyes come back." The big innkeeper rubbed his bristled chin as he mused, "I told you that there'd be no trouble gettin' folks. You done helped a lot of them over the years, so it be only natural that those same folk will be standin' by you when you need them." Canto laughed loudly at a sudden thought. "We common folk may have no magic to be drawin' on, Soreto, but there do be a *lot* of us. And that makes us the equal of any wizard."

They approached the inn where Tenna met them at the door. The quick hug she gave Soreto embarrassed both of them when it raised cheers from everyone in the tavern. Canto bulled a pathway through the crowd and, promising the wizard a feast, led Soreto to his favorite table.

Amused, the mage watched as Canto set a suckling pig turning on the spit and prepared for him a tray of fruit, bread, and cheese. The innkeeper would obviously keep Soreto's secret well. He wondered what the others would say if they knew what Canto did, and what he had told Chalek as the man lay dying.

Soreto had emerged, not from the alcove, but from a cubbyhole beside the fireplace. And as Chalek watched, Soreto had moved the mirror whose reflection had deceived him so well.

Looking down at the man who had come to kill him, Soreto told him how he had disarmed the traps that his uncle had made so many years ago. And how a simple foot switch had opened a concealed cage to allow the dozen bright-red spiders within to escape onto Chalek's body. And then he had told his final secret, the one shared with Canto, the spell that had once caused a thief to strangle himself.

He had lifted his sleeve to show the little sleeve spring that fired needles tipped with the same spider venom that was killing Chalek. It had been one of these darts, shot into the throat, that had killed the thief at Canto's inn. Then Soreto had done something cruel. He had told Chalek the secret behind the secret.

Soreto had used mechanical tricks because he had no magic powers. He had *never* had any powers. He had pretended for years, to keep living in the house left to him by his wizard uncle.

And Chalek's body, twisted by its own muscular spasms, would further feed the rumor of Master Soreto's demon, a rumor that he had always encouraged. For as he had told the dying Chalek, "I may never have had any magic, but I've always had a brain."

❧

Jon C. Crusoe lives in Tallahassee, Florida, where he has worked as a zookeeper, a museum guide, a taxi driver, and a rescue paramedic. His hobbies include blacksmithing and collecting edged weapons, books, art, and unusual beer mugs (preferably full). Having said (more than once) that if he didn't have the wasteful habit of sleeping, he would find something else to do, Jon has been forced to prove his words since he began writing. Now, late at night, his neighbors wonder at the strange sounds coming from the single lit window of the Crusoe house.

George Barr has been a professional artist since 1960 and has been one of *FANTASY Magazine*'s favorite artists since our first issue — and one of our authors too! He and has won a Hugo as Best Fan Artist and has been nominated in the Professional Artist category as well. George lives in San Jose, California.

Fire Man

by Lynn Coulter

Listen. I will tell you what it meant to be a Fire Man.

When I summoned the Fire, I focused my energy on a single point, the way a sunbeam focuses through a magnifying lens onto a blade of grass. Everything else was shut out.

Outside noises subsided — women's voices, wind rustling through trees, trucks whining along the highway. Light faded, like twilight falling. I became unconscious of my surroundings.

My body temperature climbed. A flush, like a fever, spread through my limbs. Waves of heat washed over me. Through an inner eye I saw a pinpoint of light at a tunnel's end, sharp and bright. Flames erupted around my feet, darted at my knees, jumped waist-high. A hot draft lifted my hair.

And after, all that remained was ash.

My grandmother had the power of the Fire, and her father before her. I did not know my parents; my mother died in childbirth, and all that Grandmother recalled of my father was that he was a serviceman my mother met one summer. Their names do not matter now anyway. The reservation was my home and its tribe my brothers and sisters.

But because I did not know my parents, I did not recognize that I had the power of the Fire. My grandmother suspected when I was just a boy, suspected the fevers that kept me home from the reservation school, suspected my coal-black eyes, how the black of the pupils burned and spread into the irises like paper consumed by flame. And when I was a youth, she feared my temper, the hot flashes of rage that overtook reason and restraint until every argument erupted into a fight, every opponent was beaten and bloodied.

There was trouble. Expelled from school, I was branded a hoodlum and a delinquent. Then I worked odd jobs — mechanic at the auto shop on the reservation, stock boy for the grocer, even janitor at the elementary school. And when I had saved a little money, I broke probation and ran for the city. Grandmother found me there in a cheap motel room I had rented that smelled of sweat and whiskey.

"Come home with me," she said, her hands clasped tightly on the handle of her pocketbook. She stood tall and straight, her face dignified, her still-black hair threaded with silver strands coiled at the back of her neck.

"There's nothing for me on that reservation, Grandmother," I said. I was stretched out on the dirty sheets of the bed in the motel room. I had not even bothered to rise when she came in.

"I've found a job for you," she said. "A man at the manufacturing plant will hire you. We will see your probation officer. We will make things right. But then you must come back to live on the reservation for a while."

I lay back with my hands behind my head and stared at the ceiling where a water stain bled along a crack. "Give me one good reason why I should come with you."

"Because," she said, "I love you."

And then slowly, when I proved my-

Artwork by Armand Cabrera

self ready, she began to tell me things. She told me how the Fire is a power given to those who have the strength to bear it. Sometimes it is a gift, she said, but that is rare. It is more often a burden that must be shouldered by the strong.

And she taught me. With the laying on of her hands, she taught me control and discipline. Her mind and my mind came together in understanding and I strove to put my power away into a dark place so that I would not be tempted by rage and anger, so that I would not be tempted by the wrong things.

I did not want to be a Fire Man.

"Joseph Hunter?" a voice said.

I rolled out from under the heavy machine I was repairing. "Yeah?"

One of my coworkers stood in the doorway, drumming his pen on a clipboard in his hand. "Bossman wants to see you, Hunter. Let's go."

I followed him down a hallway lit by flickering fluorescent lights. Under the green glow our uniforms were colored like brackish lake water. He pounded twice on the plant manager's door, flicked the knob to let me enter. I walked in alone and the door clicked shut behind me.

"Sit down, Hunter," said Powell, the manager. He glanced up from a yellow folder spread across his desk, then stared down at it again. "Did he tell you what I wanted?"

I slid into a chair at the edge of his desk, unsure if I was supposed to sit. "No, sir."

"We've got a problem in-house. The government agency that's been snooping around here discovered a little irregularity with those paper-pushers on the first floor. Nothing we can't fix, you understand. But it looks...bad. You know?" He looked at me, hands spread wide apart, palms up in a gesture to show me that he had nothing to hide.

I propped my elbows on the arms of the chair, clasped my hands together over my lap. The seat was not comfortable. "Sure, I understand. Don't want to look bad to the public. Might shoot down sales and profits."

He smiled broadly. "Yeah, yeah, that's exactly it. I knew you'd catch on. Sales go down, we might have to lay off."

I did not speak.

"Say, Hunter, how do you like it here anyway? Getting along okay?"

I cleared my throat, twisted around in the chair to find a comfortable position. "Yeah, sure. It's an okay place. Pretty good guys to work with."

"Yeah. You know, you're not the kind we usually hire. You were a tough guy on that reservation, huh?" He tapped the folder on his desk with a thick finger. "Then again, it's good to have somebody around who doesn't mind getting his hands dirty, if you catch my meaning."

"What," I said, and my hands were shaking, "what — was there something you wanted me to do for you?"

"Yeah, Hunter," he said, leaning back in his leather chair until the buttons of his white shirt strained across his big belly. "Yeah, there's something you could do."

Marta was whisking egg whites in the copper bowl I gave her for her birthday. A good cook, she prided herself on her collection of wicker baskets and copper pans hanging neatly on our kitchen wall. A lemony smell wafted up as her beater scraped the sides of the bowl. "Hungry?" she asked when I walked in. "I invited your grandmother to eat with us. I'm making a treat for dessert."

I came up behind her, put my arms around her waist in a hug. Her cheek felt smooth against the stubble of my afternoon beard. "You're the best thing that ever happened to me," I whispered.

The copper bowl tilted as I jostled her arm. "Oh," she said, annoyed, "look what you made me do. All over the clean counter." Without speaking, I found a towel in the drawer and mopped up the mess. "You'd better shower," she said, pouring the mixture into another pan. "Your grandmother will be here soon."

Then she stopped to look at me, the whisk dripping egg whites over the copper bowl. "Is something wrong?" she asked. I sank onto a kitchen stool and wondered what to tell her. I tied a knot in the towel and jerked the ends between my hands.

After dinner, while Marta poured detergent into a sink full of steaming water, Grandmother and I walked outside. We heard her humming to herself above the clink of the dishes that she lowered into the sink. We walked along the edge of the vegetable garden as the rose sunset faded into the lavender shades of evening.

"You're making a good life together," Grandmother said to me. It was not a question, but a conclusion. She stooped to break a sprig of parsley and nibbled at the ruffled leaves.

"It's been hard," I said. We sat on the swing hanging between two hardwood trees. "I'm thinking of leaving the reservation again," I told her, although I had just thought of it. "This is no place for a family."

Grandmother nodded, looking down into her lap where her small hands were folded like a dove at rest. "It may be time for you to go now. You are at peace with yourself?" This time she was asking me a question.

"Things are — things are not so good at the plant. Powell — he's the manager, the man who arranged my job — he wants, he asks the men to do things sometimes that don't seem right. Trouble." I shook my head. "I've had enough of trouble." I remembered how he ushered me out of his office, slapped my back and told me he knew he could count on me to take care of his problem, the plant's problem, the problem that could cost jobs.

Grandmother looked out across the patch of brown grass in our yard to the road leading to the main highway. The road curved into the horizon like a finger trailed in the dust. Beyond it, the highway roared into four lanes of asphalt shimmering with heat. "Joseph," she said, "I have lived my whole life on this reservation. But I know that you cannot run from anything. Trouble rides on your back. There is only a 'going to', not a running from." Then we sat without speaking until the crickets sang under the cover of night and the heat of the day had passed.

Days passed and Powell did not summon me again. As I worked I kept my eyes and ears open to every sight and sound. I knew he had not forgotten me. And then late one afternoon while I was working alone in the basement of the building, I heard footsteps on the metal stairs. I glanced at my watch; it was after six o'clock. I had lost track of time. The others would have packed up their tools and punched out on their time cards.

"Hunter," he said. Powell walked down the empty hallway toward me, and I saw his face glistening with sweat as he stepped under a fluorescent light and then passed back into shadow. "Hunter, wait a minute."

I gathered up my tools when I saw him coming. Now I laid the pipe wrench and toolbox back at my feet.

"Hunter, glad I caught you. Take a look at that gauge on the furnace while you're down here, will you?"

He pointed to a corner of the basement where the controls for the building's heating system were located. "The furnace?" I said. "It's hot as fire today."

"Don't be stupid, Hunter. You think winter's never gonna come again? You're already here, and I want you to check

Artwork by Armand Cabrera

those gauges. You think you can handle that or I gotta get another man?"

I wiped off my wrench slowly with a rag. "I can handle that."

He grunted. "Then do it, okay?" He kept standing there, looking at me with my head bowed and my eyes lowered. "Hunter," he said in a whisper. I could barely hear him and yet his voice echoed in the heating shafts and air ducts. "You remember I told you we had a problem with the government guys?"

I kept cleaning my tools.

"Look. Everybody's gone for today, see what I mean? If the plant was to have a little fire break out here in the basement, maybe spread onto the first floor... You get my meaning. Fire department comes, they knock it out in no time. Not much damage. Except maybe to the first floor."

I dropped my hands to my sides and looked at him. "I could go to prison for this."

"Hunter. Now would I tell you to do anything wrong? Nobody knows you're down here. Not gonna hear it from me. You take care of me, I take care of you. Know what I mean?" When I did not answer, his face twisted, ugly. "Let me explain it to you. You want your job? Wanna keep that pretty girl in a nice little house?" He straightened his tie and wiped his forehead on his white sleeve. "I think I've said enough." He left me then and I heard his footsteps receding on the cement floor in the hall.

How strange, I thought. He expected me to tamper with the furnace system. He only knew that I was a troublemaker. He could not guess that it would be much easier than that.

And I was tempted. Powell was an important man who could arrange things for me, and then Marta could enjoy the life she deserved. I had known men like him before. And if I did not help him, he would be a powerful enemy.

And so I moved my tools and toolbox beside the door. With a greasy rag I wiped the fingerprints off the pipes and gauges I had touched. Then I stripped off my shirt.

I focused my thoughts. Sweat rolled down my sides into a dark stain at the waist of my work pants. I folded my arms across my chest and summoned the Fire.

Long unused, the power came back slowly. The air in the room swirled around me in a hot vortex. Heat surged along my arms and legs, pricking my hair like an electric current. At my feet, sparks flickered over the concrete floor, lifted in the heated air, sought refuge in overturned crates and cardboard boxes stacked against the walls. Flames danced around my feet. A hot draft swept up my hair and burned into my eyes. *I'm doing this for you, Marta,* I thought. *Because I want you to have fine things. Because I love you.*

The crates in the basement, the boxes, the furnace shaft, my toolbox beside the door, the pipes and ducts swirled before my eyes in a melted mirage of images. Then out of the heat and smoke rose a vision. *Because I love you,* said my grandmother. In my mind's eye, I saw the basement filled with flames, the fire climbing upstairs and devouring paper, chairs, carpet, melting lamps and phones and desks. Like an eagle in the sky, I looked down on the thing I was about to destroy. And suddenly I saw a man in the midst of the destruction, weak and tormented. I saw myself, my soul consumed by the power of the Fire.

Later, exhausted, I lay down outside in grass damp from the evening dew. After awhile I pushed myself up on my elbows to watch the windows of the building and be sure everything was dark, the sparks all stamped out. The vision was over, the temptation past.

I walked through the parking lot to my car like a man awakened from a dream. Rolling down the windows, I breathed deep to cleanse my lungs and clear my mind. The sound of the cranking engine startled me because everything had grown so quiet. My headlights caught a few stray ashes spinning through the air. Across the road an old man leaning on a cane was poking garbage into a home-made incinerator behind his small grocery store. He heard my car and raised a hand in greeting. I watched him toss a cardboard carton into his fire and hobble back inside the store. Then I put my car in gear and eased the wheels out onto the highway, leaving the fire behind me, leaving it for what it was: a thing tamed by man, a servant to do a master's bidding. Fire, like any power, could destroy, or it could forge and temper. The choice was mine; it had always been. As the cool night air blew into the window and washed over me, I drove to where Marta was waiting. Going to, not running from. ❧

Lynn Coulter has been published in First for Women, the Atlanta newspapers, and literary reviews. This is her third story in *FANTASY Magazine*. She received a degree in journalism from Georgia State University and worked for Eastern Air Lines until its closure gave her the impetus to turn to writing.

Armand Cabrera is a self-taught artist and has been at it since he was fifteen. He has been involved in sf and fantasy art since 1980. At Denvention 1981, "Clifford Simak's opening speech was one of the most moving speeches about science fiction I had ever heard." He lives north of San Francisco and worked for several years at Lucas Films on their *STAR WARS* games.

GOTHIC IMAGE TOURS
presents

Magical Britain

a journey through the myths of time

September 8-24 1993

STONEHENGE.

An 18-day tour of the British Isles with: Geoffrey Ashe, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Paul Devereux, Julie Felix, Jamie George, John & Caitlín Matthews, John Michell, Bob Stewart, and Sir George Trevelyan.

Price: £1,750 excluding airfare. The tour is strictly limited to 30 people, so you are advised to book early.

For a detailed brochure, contact:
GOTHIC IMAGE TOURS
7 High Street, Glastonbury
Somerset BA6 9DP, England
Tel: +44 (0)458 831453; Fax: +44 (0)458 831666

Artwork by Barb Armata

Trap-Tricker

by Julia S. Mandala

"Your brother's being held in the castle dungeons," the dwarf said, holding out his gnarled hand for the promised gold. "Five cells to the right of the eastern staircase."

Dirk gave the hunched creature his most piercing glare. Dwarfs were untrustworthy and this one had come to him selling information. "If you're lying, wart —" he threatened.

"I'm no fool," sniffed the dwarf. "I wouldn't tell no lie to a wizard, not even a 'prentice like yerself."

"I may be a ''prentice' but I still know how to turn dwarfs into goat turds," Dirk said stiffly.

"There's no call for such talk, young master," said the dwarf. "I told you what you wanted to know. If you're any kind of honest man you'll pay me for my labors."

Dirk dug into his purse and pulled out two gold coins — half of all he owned. As he placed them in the upturned palm, he attached a string spell to the dwarf so he could find him again in case vengeance was called for later.

The dwarf hurriedly disappeared into the shadows, leaving Dirk staring at Helmsfast Castle, home of the master wizard Ghant. Cerisse was in the tower — the dwarf had discovered that last time (two more gold pieces). Marco was in the dungeon. Trust Ghant to give him so much territory to cover in one rescue attempt.

Dirk thought glumly that his former teacher had undoubtedly trapped the place from top to bottom. Dirk had only one trump — the trap-tricker he'd stolen from the pile of discarded magical devices Dirk had discovered in a locked storeroom in Helmsfast. The trap-tricker didn't assure success, by any means, but it did give the bearer a thirty-second delay in execution of the trap spell and one or two clues for disarming or escaping its effects. Ghant undoubtedly felt no need for such a device now that his power was so vast. Dirk, on the other hand, was relying heavily on its sorcery. The little blue orb hung comfortingly on a chain around his neck. Taking a deep breath, he headed for Helmsfast. The first trick would be to get inside the front door.

The massive oak and iron gates of Helmsfast stood open, but Dirk took no comfort from that. His skin crawled in trepidation as he passed under the archway guarded by two stone dragons. *Pop!* Dirk found himself unable to move forward or back. He was trapped.

Dirk jumped as the orb began to speak. "I'm dragon's death and dragon's life. What am I?" it asked conversationally.

"Life and death," Dirk muttered, trying not to think about the short thirty seconds he had to discover the answer. "What can kill a dragon? No, too many things. Life... heartbeat... blood... breath... breath of life... dragon's breath. Fire! *Frigium!*" He let loose a freeze spell, praying his solution was right. If not, he'd soon be a lot crispier.

"Lucky guess," said the trap-tricker, its voice heavy with disappointment. Dirk sighed in relief, though slightly annoyed when he sensed that he'd used a stronger spell than needed. "If I fry, so do you," he reminded the orb.

"I am a first rate, magical trap detection and disarming aid," said the trap-tricker haughtily. "I do not burn."

"Swell." Having passed the first test, Dirk proceeded through the gate tunnel and into the courtyard. The once-bubbling fountain in its center was now an ice sculpture thanks to his overanxious response to the first trap. As he walked toward the doorway, Dirk reminded himself he had to find as many non-magical ways as possible to escape future traps. Every wizard had only a limited power. Once used, it took time to regain. Dirk had to guard his relatively meager magical strength, for Ghant was likely to have saved the most difficult traps for later.

As he hesitantly entered the castle proper, Dirk wondered for the millionth time what had turned his master against him. Could it really be that the theft of a discarded bauble like the orb had angered Ghant so much that the wizard was ready to kill him?

Dirk had been forced to teleport out of Helmsfast to save his hide as Ghant had begun to speak the Words of Destruction. Then the wizard took Marco and Cerisse, the girl he'd hopelessly loved since childhood, and locked them away at opposite ends of the castle.

Ghant knew Dirk would come for them. But Dirk found out through the dwarf that Ghant had been summoned to the

Wizard's Conclave. Now was his chance to get Marco and Cerisse without a deadly confrontation with his old master.

Until Ghant kidnapped them, Dirk had been more puzzled than angered by the wizard's unfathomable fury. But now Dirk's own ire was raised, and he wanted to impale Ghant on his own staff. If he'd hurt Cerisse or Marco... Dirk smiled mirthlessly at his own bravado. What could he, a mere grey-class adept, hope to do against a full blue-class wizard? To survive was about all, and even that was a slim shot.

Dirk found the seemingly endless circular stair and began the tedious climb. When he'd lived at Helmsfast, he would sometimes cast a levitation spell and float to the top (Ghant had called him a wasteful and lazy cur), but levitation was energy-costly and a difficult spell to cast. Muscle power would have to do.

He was about two-thirds of the way up when he heard the *Pop!* "When is a stair not a stair?" asked the orb promptly.

Dirk's heart froze. "When it's an illusion!" he shouted, sprinting for the top.

"Darn," said the orb, unruffled by Dirk's frenzied running. "I made that one too easy."

Dirk would have cursed the orb, but he saved his breath for the climb. Now maybe fifty illusionary stairs stood between him and the top. When they disappeared, he would fall five stories to the dungeon level. Thirty stairs. He slipped on the slick stone, grimacing as the rock dug painfully into his knees. He scrambled on, using both hands and feet now. Twenty. He considered and discarded the idea of casting a levitation spell. It would all but drain him and he wasn't even sure he could set it up in his frantic mental state. Ten. Five. He could see the stairs growing transparent beneath him. Two. He launched himself forward and up.

His hands clutched at the landing just as the stairs dissolved from under his feet. Adjusting his grip, Dirk tried to pull himself up to floor level. His arms proved too weak, and he was forced to waste a small amount of energy on a muscle-strengthening spell. Still, it ate less power than the levitation spell and might just prove useful later.

Dirk paused a moment to regain his breath. He looked in disbelief over the edge of the landing at the emptiness. Ghant must want him pretty badly, to deface Helmsfast. But why? Shrugging off the unanswerable question, Dirk made his way to the door of the turret room without event. When he reached the oaken door, however, he heard the dreaded *Pop!*

The orb said nothing. "Well?" Dirk said impatiently.

"Shh!" said the orb. "I'm thinking."

"Gods!" swore Dirk in panicked fury. "What's the clue? You have to give me the clue. It's part of your spell."

"Worried?" sneered the trap-tricker. "Don't you realize the gravity of your situation?"

"You're damned right I do," shouted Dirk. "Now what's the clue?"

"I have nothing more to say," said the orb sullenly.

"You've given me the clue already!" realized Dirk. Gods! What had it said? He looked heavenward in desperation, just in time to see the stone block hurtling toward him. Dirk dove away from the door, his heel catching painfully on the block as he fell.

Other than a bruised foot, however, he escaped unscathed.

"You're not doing it right," Dirk growled.

"Life's a bitch," said the orb simply. Dirk could tell Ghant had created it. The trap-tricker had his personality. Dirk found himself developing a strong aversion to the thing.

Using his augmented strength, Dirk moved the stone block away from the turret door. He tugged on the handle, but the door wouldn't open. "Well?" he asked the orb in exasperation.

"It's a lock, not a trap, stupid," said the orb. "I don't do locks."

"A specialist, huh?" Luckily, locks were one of *his* specialties. As a part of his development as a wizard, Dirk was required to develop spells of his own. He had several already, like the string spell he'd placed on the dwarf. He'd also devised his own (fortunately power-cheap) lockpick spell.

"Open sesame," Dirk said, feeling the power leave him.

"Oh, very original," jeered the trap-tricker.

Ignoring the barb, Dirk pulled open the door. Cerisse sat huddled on some straw, her raven hair wild and her clothes dirty.

She'd looked better, and yet to Dirk, she was still the most mesmerizingly beautiful woman in the world.

"Dirk!" she exclaimed in hysterical relief. She rose and ran to him, flinging her arms around his waist and giving him a kiss.

Dirk was pleasantly surprised. Cerisse had never been anything but rude and scornful of him. He didn't even know why he loved her. But now, if they managed to escape Helmsfast with their lives, he might have one reason to thank the wizard.

"Come on," he said, reluctantly disentangling himself from her grasp. "We've still got to find Marco."

"Marco's here, too?" Cerisse asked in surprise.

"He's in the dungeon." Dirk made the mistake of looking into her blue eyes. He was momentarily entranced. "Are you all right?" he asked gently. "Did Ghant hurt you?"

"The wizard is an ass," she said, "but he didn't do anything more than bore me to tears. Are you sure Marco's here?"

"He'd better be, or there'll be one more goat turd in the world," growled Dirk.

They couldn't get down the way they came, so Dirk led the way toward the eastern tower. He made Cerisse walk several paces behind him. That way, if he failed to disarm a trap, at least she might survive. Tension rose in him as he waited for the next trap to be sprung. They were nearing the other staircase when the inevitable *Pop!* came.

"I come with age but I leave you with nothing," said the orb.

"Wisdom? Poverty?" guessed Dirk.

"You're not even close," said the trap-tricker derisively. "Looks like the wizard got you this time."

Comes with age, thought Dirk desperately. "Death?"

"No."

Death and — "Senility!" Memory-sucker spell! "*Verito memoratus!*" intoned Dirk, diffusing the spell. It was a big drain on his power, but he'd had little choice. The memory-sucker spell would have left him wandering helplessly through Helmsfast into any trap Ghant had left lying around.

"That was brilliant!" gushed Cerisse. "You're very cool under pressure." She came up behind him and gave him another hug. The press of her shapely body against him was temptingly distracting. He indulged himself a moment before pulling away. She must have had the wits scared out of her by Ghant. Dirk couldn't think of any other reason for the melting of her cold reserve.

"We'd better keep moving," Dirk said. "I want to be long gone by the time Ghant returns from the Wizard's Conclave." He hesitated only slightly before stepping onto the stairs. There was no popping sound and the stones didn't disappear.

So far, so good. He and Cerisse made it all the way to the dungeon level without event. Two sputtering torches halfheartedly lit the doorway which opened onto a row of cells. Dirk no sooner crossed the threshold when he heard the *Pop!*

"I'm not dead, but I'm not alive," intoned the orb.

Dirk waited. "That's it?" he said after several precious seconds passed.

The orb glowed smugly. "That's it, smart boy."

Time was passing, but nothing was coming. "Plants?"

"Nope."

"Water? The wind?"

"Interesting guesses, but no."

Pop! The trap, whatever it was, had sprung. Dirk looked around wildly. Nothing... nothing... wait! A pale figure swathed in black emerged from the shadows. Red eyes, long, gory fangs, moon-pale skin. Vampire! He had no spell for that.

"Cerisse, run!" he ordered, backing as far away as the spell would let him get from the horrific apparition. One of the torches gave its last gasp and went out.

"You are mine," hissed the vampire in a low, hypnotic tone. Dirk felt the undead's soporific power sucking away at his will. Dirk stopped trying to retreat. He fought the desire to give himself up to the creature's blood lust. Soon he would have no more will of his own.

"Come!" ordered the vampire. Dirk grabbed at the dead torch, trying to anchor himself to the spot.

"Goodbye, fool," said the orb.

The words stirred the embers of his anger. Dirk wrenched the torch from the holder as he struggled for control. He glanced at the wooden stick in his hand before starting toward the undead in slow, jerky steps.

"Dirk!" called Cerisse. She had foolishly refused to run. He didn't have the strength to urge her again. He could smell the stink of death and decay. The vampire was only an arm's length away. "Dirk, fight it," cried Cerisse. "Don't give in." One more step. Suddenly, Dirk swung the torch with all his magic-enhanced strength and drove the wood deep into the vampire's chest. A fountain of blood spurted from the wound as the creature shrieked its death cry. A flailing hand raked Dirk's cheek.

He watched in disgusted horror as over the course of a minute the vampire rotted and decayed into dust.

Cerisse ran to him, hugged him tight, and pressed a handkerchief against his bleeding cheek. "Stay back! It scratched me with its claws," said Dirk, panic welling up inside him. "I may become one of the undead."

"That's werewolves, you moron," said the trap-tricker superciliously.

"Oh." Dirk's relief was complete and he was able to enjoy Cerisse's ministrations. He noticed again the delicious sensations evoked by her body against his. Desire overtook him so quickly he didn't even notice the *Pop!* His arms encircled her waist of their own accord, and he leaned down to take her willing mouth with his own. His hands began to explore the mysteries of her curves.

"I am life." The orb's voice was a discordant note in the symphony of love. "The link from generation to generation," continued the trap-tricker.

Link? There was only one link Dirk was interested in at the moment. Cerisse drew his face back to hers.

"I am the trap feared most by men,"

Artwork by Barb Armata

said the orb desperately.

Trap? The orb's words finally penetrated the haze of passion that clouded Dirk's mind. *What's wrong here?* he asked himself. *Cerisse would never —*

"Woman!" he exclaimed quickly, having no idea how much time was left before the trap went off. He pushed Cerisse away. She stumbled and fell to the ground, but he could have no part of a woman who, willing or not, was part of Ghant's schemes. It was perhaps the hardest thing Dirk ever had to do, but he turned away from the one love of his life, the one who had always scorned him, but who was now offering him everything. Ghant was treacherous indeed. Not daring to look back, Dirk leapt over the vampire dust and ran down the hall till he reached the fifth cell.

"Open sesame," he said hastily and pulled open the metal door. The cell was shrouded in darkness. "Marco?" Dirk called as he stepped hesitantly across the threshold. This time, he heard the *Pop!*

"Why?" said the orb.

"Why, what?" demanded Dirk. He'd been through too many things in too short a time and had no more patience for riddles.

"Why are you here?" asked the trap-tricker.

"This is no time for a philosophical discussion!"

"I don't mean in the metaphysical sense," snapped the orb. "Think, boy, think!"

Cerisse came running up behind him, carrying the other torch. She looked surprisingly unruffled by his rebuff. "Where's Marco?" she asked.

Dirk looked in the cell, now lit from the torch, and saw it was empty. His temper flared uselessly and he instinctively reached for the string he'd put on the dwarf. He staggered in surprise. "You!" he gasped at Cerisse. "How?"

"Hurry and answer, fool!" urged Cerisse, her voice no longer the melodious tones of the woman he'd loved, but the deep, harsh voice of Ghant.

"What, was all this some kind of test?" Dirk guessed. He'd better be right. If he read the trap right, failure would result in his being locked in that cell for an eternity.

"Correct," said the orb. "Congratulations and farewell." The sphere disappeared in a puff of blue smoke. Cerisse's form melted and warped until Ghant himself stood beside him. Dirk unconsciously shied away from the old man. "You were the dwarf!" Dirk said. "And Cerisse." Dirk was cross at all the deception and still didn't understand why Ghant had done it. "Where are Cerisse and Marco?" he demanded.

"They are fine," said Ghant shortly. He was unused to Dirk's tone. "I just released them from the alternate plane where I was holding them."

"What the hell was this all about?" asked Dirk. "I could have been killed."

"A test, as you surmised," said Ghant, amusement in his eyes. "A test to see if you were worthy of becoming a green-class adept. I never said becoming a wizard would be safe."

Dirk's anger momentarily fled. "And?" he prompted, nervous and excited.

"You are now a wizard of the green class," pronounced Ghant. "You were clever enough to recognize the value of the trap-tricker when I permitted you to find the storeroom. You have learned to use magic judiciously, to think quickly and act fast. And you were strong enough to turn away from the distracting temptations of physical desire."

Dirk suddenly realized he'd been kissing his master there in the hall. He looked at Ghant sideways. "What kind of pervert have I been living with, who would make up a test like that?" Dirk asked.

"The choice of tests was determined by your personal strengths and weaknesses, not by me," said Ghant stiffly. "I'm as appalled as you are by the entire ordeal."

"What would you have done if I'd failed that test?" Dirk asked with a grin.

Ghant put an arm around his apprentice's shoulder and led him toward the stairs. The wizard smiled wryly. "I guess we'll never know."

❧

Julia S. Mandala is a thirty-year-old practicing attorney who has been transplanted from Kansas City to Louisiana to Dallas. "Trap-Tricker" is her first professional sale. Over the last four years, in her "spare time", she has been writing a fantasy novel which is close to completion. When not working on one of her two careers, she enjoys scuba diving, reading, and movies.

Barb Armata has been seen frequently in these pages and is a perennial favorite of *FANTASY* readers. She is a native of the Northern Berkshires and lives in Adams, Massachussetts. She has dabbled in several areas of art, doing commercial signs and ads, comics, illustration, and paintings. Her depictions of "the odd, the alien, and the everyday" can be seen at Northeast sf convention art shows such as Boskone.

Pulphouse

a fiction magazine

Pulphouse Publishing, Inc. Box 1227, Eugene, OR 97440 Ph (503) 935-6322 Fax (503) 935-6324

13 issues for $39.00.

First Class, Canadian, and overseas subscriptions add $1.00 per issue.

Daughter of the Blood

by Solange Wallace

She lifted her head and stared up with dull pain-filled eyes. A sheet of dust kicked toward her, and she did nothing but blink slowly. The figure before her wavered in a haze of yellow and red: the colors of pain. Her pain was almost gone now, or at least in the back of her mind. She was beyond pain, really, but even pain had been better than the all-encompassing numbness she felt now. The haze cleared, and she regretted its loss.

"Would you like to try that again, my dear?"

Despite herself, a flicker of heat lighted in her eyes.

"Ah, that's more like it." The hateful voice laughed delightedly. He might have been a handsome man, but the lines of cruelty crisscrossing his face destroyed that possibility. He might have been her brother; his light blond hair matched her own perfectly, but his eyes were a brilliant blue whereas hers were the color of ebony. Her face was as classic as his, her beauty marred by pain and weariness. Her body was bruised and battered, yet not a pinpoint of blood would have been detected upon it. *He* had been careful about that, very careful. The Blood Mages always were.

A drop of blood hit the ground before her. The mage held out his sliced wrist. He was ready to finish the battle she had begun.

"Come on, witch. Try again," he sneered.

Witch. How untrue. He had more power in his pinkie than she had in her entire body. Her pitiful attempt to protect her home had been in vain. Her herbal-aided magics were no match against a formally trained Blood Mage,

Artwork by Frank Kelly Freas

and he knew it. It was just a game to him, and the Blood Mages were all gamemasters.

Another drop of blood splattered the ground, this time from her. She worried her bloody lip, and waited for death. A feeling of euphoria swept over her, an end to the dreadful numbness. Relief and anger roared out of her, and exploded. She welcomed the encompassing darkness with a smile.

"Tarquil? Tarquil, are you all right?"

Tarquil mumbled a reply and turned over in her bed. Her bruised ribs and battered body groaned in protest. She welcomed the pain with unusual relish.

"Tarquil?" the young voice repeated.

"I'm okay, Kevyn. Don't worry about it." Tarquil smiled feebly, and made to sit up.

Her sister bent to aid her, her blue eyes bright with concern. "Are you sure you're all right, Tar?"

Tarquil sat upright and squinted as the world swam dizzily before her. "One question, Kevyn. What happened?"

Excitement mixed with concern. "You should have seen him, Tar!" At her sister's puzzled frown, Kevyn stopped. "I mean, afterwards. You know, later."

"Later than what?"

"Don't you know, Tar? You killed him!"

You killed him. Tarquil sat back in shock. *You killed him.* Tarquil's eyes met her sister's. "How?" she choked out.

Kevyn's eyes narrowed. "Well, I'm not sure. It was after he hit you — you know, with that lightning bolt, and you were on the ground. He cut his wrist" — she shuddered delicately — "and started drinking his blood like it was some kind of wine. Then suddenly he began screaming. You were holding his ankle, and I swear I saw smoke coming from his hair. You didn't wake up afterwards for hours." She stopped and added almost absently, "And he was crisper than burnt bacon. He's not blond anymore."

Tarquil flinched from her sister's matter-of-fact attitude. A horrible thought filtered into her mind.

"Was I...bleeding at all when you found me?"

Kevyn cocked her head thoughtfully.

"You had a bloody lip. That's all."

A bloody lip. She remembered now. Her feeling of euphoria...of relief, anger, energy...her feeling of power.

She was one of *them.*

"Hello, little one. How is my *neta* doing?"

Little fire, Tarquil thought bitterly. *In more ways than one.* She lifted her head and managed a smile for her parents. "I'm fine, Da. Are you and Mother all right?"

Her father smiled, and sat on the edge of the bed. "We're fine, *neta.* Better than you, eh?"

Tarquil smiled, and looked at her parents' faces with almost desperate need. Her father, blond and handsome as ever in his rugged way with her sister's eyes staring from his face. Her small, delicate mother stood next to him. Dark hair loose and black eyes serious, she was the complete antithesis of her husband. Whatever their differences, though, their love for each other was as clear as water.

"Something is troubling you, *fari.* What is it?" her mother asked, astute as ever. None of them could ever hide anything from her sharp, dark eyes.

Little ambition. Her mother had always seen the hunger beneath her calm surface. She always had to be the best. The most beautiful girl in town, the best dancer in town, the best *witch* in town. For Tarquil, anything less wasn't good enough. Her mother called out her ambition now, but for once she was far from the truth.

"I'm leaving. I'll be gone in a week."

Her mother paled, her father reddened, and her sister opened her eyes wide in shock.

"Why?" her father managed to choke out. "To where?"

"To Nefar."

"Nefar? But that's where..." Her mother's eyes opened in horror.

"The Blood Mages are," Tarquil finished for her. "*I* am a Blood Mage."

If they had been shocked before, it was nothing compared to the horror they felt now. She wasn't sure if she was much better.

"I didn't know until just now," she said calmly, and hid her shaking fingers beneath the covers. She took advantage of their silence. "It was when Kevyn mentioned that mage's death. I thought I was about to die, and I had bitten my lip until it bled. It was strange what I felt," she sighed dreamily. "At first I thought it was just relief, I was in a lot of pain, but I now realize that it wasn't. It was power, pure power! And I had felt it before. Every time I had cut or scraped myself, and especially during my time. Remember when I had cut my hand while slicing vegetables? I bled for a full five minutes, and I never felt so good in my life. Think of it. I killed a man just by biting my lip. And not just a man. A full *Blood Mage,* formally trained at Nefar!"

She had raised her hand in the air, half-kneeling in her bed. She stopped abruptly and stared at her terrified family. She was disgusted at the brief hint of satisfaction she felt upon recognizing their fear.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I guess I just got carried away." She laughed nervously, hoping...but she already saw the fear and revulsion in their eyes.

Artwork by Frank Kelly Freas

"You *bragged* about killing a man!" her mother whispered hoarsely, tears forming in her eyes. *"You bragged about it."*

"The curse of the power," her father muttered under his breath.

Tarquil laughed again, bitterly.

"Ah, yes. The curse behind the gift. All Blood Mages are insane, they say. Perhaps they are right. And there is no better reason than that for me to leave."

"I do not want you to leave, Tarquil," Kevyn said. Of them all, her eyes held the least fear.

"Thank you, *giante*, but you do not want pain either and that is what I would bring you. Every time I drew blood, accidentally or not, I could end up killing one of you."

"But, *neta*, the Blood Mages? You've seen the things they do, and now you want to become one of them!" her father pleaded.

"I *already* am one of them, Da," she said softly. "And what better way to get even, Da? I feel a little vengeful. Not for being a Blood Mage, no, but for having such a harsh awakening. Nefar has some rules that need to be rewritten."

Her father smiled, genuinely. "And my *neta* is the one to do it."

"Don't forget the second meaning, Da. Little fire...or revenge."

"And what will you be using?" her mother asked, her black eyes intent.

"For now, Mother, little fire. For now."

"State your name." The harsh command was thrown at her the moment she entered the dismal recruiting room of the Blood Mage school.

"Who asks?" she replied coolly.

The trip from domus Altair to Nefar had not been under the best of conditions, and she was in no mood for rudeness. Hers had been a tearful and painful farewell, an experience she would not like to repeat. She had also added another name to her list of fatalities. A luckless road bandit had had the ill fortune to accost the wrong person, and during the robbery he had been unfortunately killed when a nick from him drew blood. She had no more remorse for him than she had for the mage. With insanity, it seemed, there came a mystical cooling effect on the emotions, and an extraordinary logic. It was self-defense, her mind convinced her, and sometimes she believed it, but it was the other times when she knew that death could have been avoided.

She might as well get used to it, she thought grimly. The Blood Mages killed for a living, especially each other. In order to advance through the twelve levels of blood magic, the apprentice, journeyman, or mage had to kill another in the level above them and take that person's place. In that way, the mages reasoned, only the best survived among the Blood Mage ranks.

She planned to be one of those survivors.

"State your name," the voice demanded again.

"And I said, who's asking?"

Tarquil was surprised by the figure that answered her somewhat insolent question. She had been expecting a tall, stern man to match that equally stern voice, but what she saw was a short, red-haired man with a sprinkling of freckles across his face. His eyes, however, were the coldest she had ever seen.

"Lesson One: Never question a higher level sorcerer."

His hand was too quick to avoid. It flicked across her face with the speed of a snake, and had the power of a horse. She reeled back slightly from the blow.

"Lesson Two: Never underestimate anyone." A second slap bloodied her lip.

"Lesson Three: Get used to pain." His third slap knocked her off her feet.

"Lesson Four," she snarled through bloody teeth. She condensed her power into a tight fist. The explosion threw him halfway across the room, against the farthest wall. "Don't be surprised."

The man picked himself up and stood. If he was in any pain, it didn't show from his smooth movements. By now, he must have been used to it. He walked back to his desk.

"State your name."

"Tarquil de Tarra, domus Altair."

Tarquil wheezed in pain. The blow to her stomach made her want to vomit.

"Get your head up," someone warned, but she lifted her head up a fraction too late. The blunt-ended staff glanced off her unprotected head. She writhed in pain for a second, and was standing the next, barely missing the finishing blow. The mages played for keeps. Only one out of every ten newcomers survived the first month of training, and *then* they had to take a final test in order to gain the apprenticeship. And of those ten survivors out of a hundred, only one lived long enough to become an eighth-level mage.

Again, she planned to be that one, but it was getting, as her father would say, bloody tough.

"Lesson Sixteen: A physical weapon doesn't have to draw blood in order to kill," her red-haired teacher stated. The only time he spoke to her was to remind her of a lesson, and each lesson was accompanied by pain.

She gashed her lip with her teeth savagely. The blood from her head mingled with that of her lip, and the ends of her staff burst into flames.

"Lesson Seventeen: Don't hesitate to take advantage of a situation."

She slashed at him with the staff. He backhanded her across the face with his staff's tip, and she returned with a hit to the small of his back. The sound of hot wood hitting flesh resounded pleasantly in her ears. He lay gasping on the ground. She lifted her staff, aimed, and hesitated. The punishing blow nearly knocked her unconscious. Her teacher's staff lodged itself under her chin.

"Lesson Eighteen: There is no such thing as mercy."

The first week nearly battered and pounded her to death. The second week tried to cut her into tiny pieces.

"Lesson Twenty-Five: Take any blow but a mortal one from an edged weapon."

"What's the point of having power if you bleed to death, right?" Tarquil smiled wryly and ducked around his whirling blades. A dozen nicks marked her body, but none marked his. She had hit him to bruise and made sure his blows drew blood, but only enough to help. Of the lessons she had learned so far, perhaps that was one of the more useful. She ducked again, and slowly brought her magic to play. She was getting more proficient in control every day, but there were still times when the power got away from her. Now was one such time.

Instead of the ground in front of him bursting into flames, *she* was suddenly faced with a wall of fire. She stumbled back, her alarm only fueling the fire. As usual, her teacher took advantage of the situation. With masterful control, he leaped straight through the curtain of flames. She fell back, her feet tangling in the long grass. He brought his knife up against her throat.

"Lesson Twenty-Six: Never overestimate your own powers."

End of practice.

Week three was fire in every shape or form that it came in.

She focused her mind, clenched her fist, and thrust it into the hot coals. Agony coursed down her body, running like

blood through her veins. She tensed her jaw but refused to let any pain show on her face.

"Lesson Forty-Two: Control is everything," he whispered softly beside her.

But the pain was unfamiliar. It was like nothing she had ever felt before. The sharp, tensing pain she was used to and even beginning to relish, but this *burning* agony destroyed all her precious control. Sweat beaded on her forehead. A tear squeezed out of the corner of her eye. Her jaw began to relax for the screams.

"Lesson Forty-Three," she choked out, fighting desperately for control. "Know when to quit."

She pulled her sooty fist from the heat, and rinsed it with clean water. She held it in the air and stared at the unmarred flesh.

"Know when to quit."

The fourth week was — what else — explosions.

She was finding herself on the ground a lot more times than she would have wished. Bruises were no stranger to her these days. She drew herself together and slashed at him with a tight ground explosion. It was only enough to knock him off balance, but it kept him from spellcasting for the moment. And a moment was all she needed to regain her posture. He countered with a lightning bolt, but she flung it aside with one of her own. The ground around them was scorched and blackened.

"Lesson Forty-Nine: Lightning does strike the same place twice!" her teacher shouted and threw a second bolt.

"I think I get the point!" she returned and avoided a third bolt. "Do I pass now?"

She dodged and threw. His shadow flared, and the air around her crackled.

Sneaky.

Air-current electricity was difficult to master, and even more difficult to attack with. She blocked it with a positive energy cloud. He stopped suddenly and closed his fists, indicating the end of the battle.

"The test hasn't even begun yet, Tarquil de Tarra of domus Altair."

She started. It was the first time he had ever spoken to her outside of lessons.

"Come to the central room at dawn. *Then* your test shall begin."

Tarquil closed her fists and nodded slightly. "My thanks, sir."

His palm connected with her face. She tasted blood. "Lesson Fifty: A Blood Mage never thanks anyone."

Tarquil stood before the Assembly of Mages, nervously watching their moves. She stood in a perfectly round room, the only furniture the table the mages sat behind. There were five in all, one among them her esteemed teacher. In the midst of them sat the Arch-Mage. *He* was the imposing figure she had expected in the beginning. Steel-gray eyes stared from beneath bushy black eyebrows. Thick black hair was held back by an unadorned circlet. His face was stern and arrogant, very sure of itself. His robes were blood red and plain, his bearing alone proclaiming his high position. The mages beside him were similarly dressed, and as unreadable as he.

"State your name."

Tarquil bit back a grin. "Tarquil de Tarra of domus Altair."

Not a flicker of expression crossed his face. "You completed the entire four weeks of audition."

Audition. She almost sneered aloud. She had seen three people die during their so-called auditions.

"Yes," she answered curtly. Another lesson. There were no *sirs* or *madames* in Nefar. *They* had no need for courtesies.

"You are taking the Test." It wasn't a question, it was an order.

"Yes."

The Arch-Mage nodded briefly. "Prepare yourself, then." Then he said something unexpected. "Good luck."

"Thank you," she replied automatically in surprise. She took a step back, tensed her body, and waited for the pain.

Nothing happened.

Then she felt a feather-light touch on her forehead, and her mind was torn apart. There was no pain, only an incredible feeling of invasion, and the room around her shifted. She was home. Her parents and Kevyn sat at the kitchen table eating breakfast.

"Da?" she whispered incredulously.

He looked up, startled. "*Neta*? Is that you? Is it really you?"

"Da!" she cried and ran into his arms.

Kevyn hugged her waist. "We thought we'd never see you again, Tar!"

Tarquil smiled over her father's shoulder at her mother. "Mum?"

Elise de Tarra was crying. She hugged her daughter tightly.

"You've come home, my *fari*?" her mother asked hesitantly. She stared into her daughter's dark eyes. She covered her mouth with her fist. "You've done it again," she cried. "You've done it *again!*"

"It was an accident," Tarquil defended. "He was a road bandit. He tried to kill me!"

Comprehension blossomed on her father and Kevyn's faces. Tarquil opened her mouth to speak when she was interrupted by her mother's scream, and an explosion rocked the house. Tarquil sprinted outside immediately, her hands raised and ready to fight. She stopped outside the doorway in shock.

He stood before her like a glorified angel, the sun shining directly behind him. His deep eyes matched the color of the sky above. He was clothed simply in black robes, an onyx ring his only adorn-

Artwork by Frank Kelly Freas

ment. His face was one of the most beautiful she had ever seen...and he was a Blood Mage.

"Well, well, well. What have we here? The village witch, mayhap," he laughed and sauntered closer.

Her eyes widened in horror. *Him.* It was happening. Again.

"Did you know that your *village* has been quite naughty, witch? They have actually refused me." He laughed again in amazement. "Would you believe it? A simple request for room and board, and they refused me. Me. *A ninth-level Blood Mage.*"

She spat at his feet. "And their daughters for the night, no doubt."

He pursed his sensuous lips. "Such a little sacrifice, I would think. Of what importance are peasants' daughters?" His brilliant eyes narrowed and his voice lowered to a purr. "Would you, my lovely girl, refuse me as well?"

"I would willingly die before lying with you," she said disdainfully.

The same words as before.

He tapped his nose with one elegant finger. "That, my dear, can be arranged."

The fireball exploded at her feet. She was thrown into the air, instinctively bracing herself for the fall. Despite herself, the contact jarred her to the bone. She regained her balance instantly, shaky but on two feet, and countered with a fireball of her own, shielding her eyes as it illuminated his entire figure in red and gold. An electrical hand grasped her by the throat and dangled her above the ground. The mage stepped from the fire, ruffled but unharmed. He moved his fingers, and her body shook like a rag doll's. She drew her fist back and punched at the air. He staggered back and lost his hold on her as the air before him condensed and struck. She dropped to the ground and rose with difficulty. She could barely breathe.

He smiled. "Well done, witch." He drew a knuckled fist across his bloody lip. He laughed, and pure energy condensed in his fist. It was a spell she had never seen before. She had no way to protect herself. She was knocked almost senseless, hanging onto consciousness with almost fanatical desperation.

She lifted her head and stared up with dull, pain-filled eyes. A sheet of dust kicked toward her, but she did nothing but blink slowly. The figure before her wavered in a have of yellow and red: the colors of pain. Her pain was almost gone now, or at least in the back of her mind. She was beyond pain, really, but even pain had been better than the all-encompassing numbness she felt now. The haze cleared, and she regretted its loss.

"Would you like to try that again, my dear?"

A drop of blood hit the ground before her. The mage held out his sliced wrist. He was ready to finish the battle she had begun.

"Come on, witch. Try again," he sneered.

Another drop of blood splattered to the ground, this time from her. She worried her bloody lip, and waited for death. A feeling of euphoria swept over her, an end to the dreadful numbness. Relief and anger roared out of her...and power.

Power.

She recognized it now.

She was a Blood Mage.

She stared at the booted feet before her. She reached out her hand and squeezed. She stared up in satisfaction as the mage's mouth opened in a soundless scream. His flesh crackled and his hair blackened as pure energy swept through his body.

Crisper than burnt bacon, and not blond anymore.

Tarquil rose painfully and stepped away from the corpse. She grinned in satisfaction and turned to the house. Her family stood before her, obviously terrified. Her grin widened.

"Don't worry. It's okay now." She moved toward them.

They stepped back, whimpering in fear. Fear of *her.*

"What's wrong? I'm not going to hurt you."

"Go away!" her father shouted, revulsion in his eyes.

"Please don't hurt my family," her mother whimpered.

"Mummy, make her go away!" Kevyn cried in terror.

"I'm not going to hurt you!" Tarquil cried angrily. A fireball formed in her hand.

"I'm...not...going...to...hurt...you!" Each word was punctured with a fireball, and their faces melted before her.

"I'm not going to hurt you!" she screamed and screamed...

"Open your eyes."

Tarquil felt the tears running down her face.

"Open your eyes."

Tarquil pushed the voice from her mind.

"Open your eyes."

She opened them.

She stood in the center of a perfectly round room. Five plain-clothed mages sat before her.

"It wasn't real," she whispered in a hoarse voice.

"Are you prepared to accept your fate?" the Arch-Mage demanded of her in a relentless voice.

"Will you become like him? It is what a Blood Mage is."

"It doesn't have to be like that," she said faintly, wiping the tears from her cheeks.

"It has always been that way," the mage intoned harshly.

"Choose your name," the Arch-Mage commanded.

Choose your name.

The name of a Blood Mage.

She thought of Nefar, the city of the Blood Mages.

She thought of her father, and the loss of his *neta.*

She thought of her sharp-eyed mother, eyes so much like her own.

Fari.

She thought of Kevyn, so innocent. An innocence she no longer had.

She remembered a blond mage, a mage she was forced to kill. Revenge, she had wanted before; she still wanted it.

Finally, she thought of power. She bit her lip, and euphoria swept over her, glorying in the pleasure only power could give her.

Neta and *fari.*

Revenge and ambition.

She closed her eyes.

Neta and *fari.*

Nefar, city of the Blood Mages.

She smiled and opened her eyes.

"Nefari."

Why not have both?

The Arch-Mage stared intently at her face. Something akin to recognition sparked in his eyes. He nodded slightly.

"So be it. You are Nefari. A daughter of Nefar, City of the Blood Mages."

The smile spread to her eyes.

"I am Nefari. Daughter of the Blood."

❧

SOLANGE WALLACE is eighteen and a senior in high school. Her college plans include a major in pre-law and a minor in creative writing or English. In addition to reading and writing, her hobbies include Tae Kwon Do, and collecting figurines and weapons. "Daughter of the Blood" is her first sale.

FRANK KELLY FREAS has been active in the sf field since 1950 and has received more Hugo Awards for his art than most people ever dream of. He lives in the Los Angeles area with his wife Laura.

Marion Zimmer Bradley Talks To Writers:
Suspension of Disbelief

The definition of fantasy is often given as THE WILLING SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF.

This does not mean, of course, that a writer can simply ignore all the rules of common sense. Somehow or other, the writer must make his reader believe what he says.

In fantasy — or in science fiction — there are many things you can do; but every story, however fantastic, must obey the rules of its own universe. If you are writing science fiction, and yet you wish to write about vampires, or unicorns, it can be done, but you must somehow make the reader believe it. The 19th century writer of **DRACULA** faced an almost insurmountable problem. He had to make readers, in a milieu that accepted scientific method as fact, *believe* that such a creature as a vampire could exist.

A formidable challenge, no? Well, that is one reason Bram Stoker's **DRACULA** has endured for more than a hundred years. Stoker carefully worked out all the rules by which such a creature could survive, and in one chapter of his book laid out all the pros and cons. After stating everything the vampire *could* do, he lines up all the limitations on the vampire's power. He has van Helsing say, "Yes, though he can do all these things, yet he is less free than the slave in his galley, the convict in his cell." He has weaknesses which they, the adversaries, can exploit. He states carefully that he "makes in a mirror no reflect"; he can move only at night ("no small advantage, this," in a world where electric light had not yet been invented) while during the day he is unable to move about and is at their mercy. He lines out carefully the advantages and disadvantages of being a vampire, which is why I, for one, have always considered **DRACULA** not so much fantasy as science fiction.

Even in fantasy a world must have its rules. Probably one of the earliest formulators of this logic was Charles Dickens in **A CHRISTMAS CAROL**. He jumps right into it by beginning with, "Marley was dead, of course." He states that if you don't believe that, it would be useless to hear all that follows. Flippant as Dickens may have been, that old fellow really had the right of it. Nothing is more important than to establish your ground rules as soon as the story starts.

Difficult as Stoker's task was, it pales into insignificance compared to the task of making an audience in 1993 believe in vampires. In writing about vampires in the 20th century, we must rely heavily on editorial fiat: "There are vampires, believe it or not, because I said so."

In fantasy this can still be done because most people reading fantasy are — whether they admit it or not — playing a literary game of "Suppose...": in the manner of, "If there were vampires, this is what they might be like." If you can make it sound rational, your audience will believe in vampires for the duration of the *story*. But to get them really to believe in vampires after the book has been put back on the shelf — that's something else again. There is such a thing as not wanting to believe; this is why some people won't read scary stories at all. They don't want to believe in vampires — or cannibals or anything like that — even while reading, let alone after the book is closed.

Whitley Strieber in **THE HUNGER**, and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, in her tales of the courtly vampire St. Germain, have done about as well as anyone else in making us believe their literary vampires — for people who *want* to believe in vampires at least while they're reading about them. Still, Strieber had to rely very heavily on alien biology and an undiscovered race. But when he broke another taboo of the sf-reading universe in his book about UFOs, and expected science fiction people — probably the most determinedly rational people in the universe — to *believe* it, they wouldn't. No less a person than Dr. Jerry Pournelle pointed out to me that the evidence for UFOs is better than most other evidence; still sf people won't believe it. They don't want to believe it — in spite of the fact that on any other subject under the sun, the sworn evidence of a sober policeman is accepted as good enough for any court of law.

I believe it, because Strieber (a best-selling author) would have made up something better if he were making it up. But when I tentatively put that theory forward to fans they commented that Strieber could have relied on that belief and deliberately written it in a way no one would believe — counting on just that reaction.

You can't win.

When I first began writing science fiction in the fifties, the worst thing one could say about a purported book of science fiction was, "It's fantasy." In the fifties the most popular kind of fantasy — there wasn't much — was the Other Worlds type which I call "spoof fantasy". They thought of it as unlikely; it was *supposed* to be silly and unbelievable. Fritz Leiber broke that taboo with **CONJURE WIFE** by writing fantasy which could almost be *believed*. The late H. P. Lovecraft said in **PICKMAN'S MODEL**, "Any third rate painter can slosh paint wildly on the canvas and call it a Witches' Sabbath, but it's quite different to make such a thing really *scare*." This story gets its believable horror from the last sentence, "There was nothing on the photo but the creature he had been painting and a section of the garage wall. But — by God — it *was a photograph from life*." Imagine being able to photograph a monster that "doesn't exist".

That doesn't mean that when you ask the reader to suspend

his disbelief you have the right to ask him to hang it by the neck till dead. You cannot ask the reader, now that men have landed on the Moon, to accept "cities" there — or canals on waterless Mars.

Once on a panel I was asked what the most preposterous manuscript I'd ever gotten was. Actually there were two; the first was a piece of non-fiction, contending, I believe seriously, that men really had the secret of cloning and were denying it to women, to whom it was *very* important to have daughters without male intervention.

Then there was the piece of fiction I received from somebody or other for the first volume of Sword and Sorceress. It wasn't badly written; but — are you ready for this? — it dealt with a college of priestesses, each of whom was telepathically bonded (as Anne McCaffrey's dragons to their riders) to a *telepathic purple rhinoceros!*

I couldn't believe it even while I was reading it. And as if that weren't enough — the whole college was managed by sadistic lesbian priestesses.

Need you ask what I did? They don't call me "the fastest rejection slip in the West" for nothing.

So ask yourself not only, "Can people believe this?" but "Will people *want* to believe it?

I used during my extreme youth to write confessions — you know, those sin-suffer-and-repent things in *True Story*. The only one I ever had rejected as "too unlikely" was the story "Raised as a teenage boy — now I'm pregnant."

Yet that was a case history direct from a medical text on endocrinology. I could have submitted a nasty letter to that editor with a textbook reference, but the editor is always right even when she's wrong. This story would not have given insight about her life to the average housewife or teenager.

I don't think I could even have written it as fantasy. Science fiction, maybe.

Writers Talk Back

Avoiding the Earthquake

by Lynne Armstrong-Jones

I couldn't care less whether your characters live and do well, or whether they were all wiped out on the last page by a convenient earthquake. - MZB

Oh, what a terrible fate for a writer's beloved characters! The writer *must* make the readers *care* ... but how?

There are a few guidelines for writing which I've read about and heard stated on several occasions, by various writing professionals.

One is that the protagonist should be, if not definitely "likable", at least interesting; the first step might be getting the reader to *care* what happens to this character. So ... how does a writer accomplish this?

The best phrase I've heard to describe this (and I don't recall the source) is that the writer must strive to make *the readers feel like the story is happening to them*. And how is *this* accomplished?

One important factor can be the art of *precision*; that is, the writer must be very *clear* and *specific* in communicating what the character feels and experiences. For example, use of a more general word like "dark" might imply (a) evil intent, (b) an overcast sky or (c) simply the color of a person's skin (without positive or negative connotations). The writer must choose words which very *clearly* get the meaning across: Notice the great difference in the use of the word "dark" versus "ominous" or out-and-out "evil".

In addition, it is helpful to involve sensory appeal. What does the setting *look* like? It can be helpful to include little everyday details such as whether or not the television is on; what time of day is it (what is the position of the sun in the sky)? These details will help the readers to picture the scene in their minds. Also important, though, are the other four senses.

Let's consider an example. Let's say that a character has entered an office building which appears to be deserted. What does the character *hear* when he/she enters a room? What non-dialogue noises might there be — a soft *whirr* from the ventilation system? The *tick-tock*ing of a clock?

What might the character *feel*? Is there a slight chill from the air conditioning system? Does the character's hand rest on a hard table-top? Is this cool? Warm? And what about *emotions*? Might the atmosphere send a chill up the person's spine for reasons other than the room's temperature?

Now, what about *smell*? Might there be some odor in that room, something either usual or unusual, depending on the story? A faint scent of something burnt perhaps, if an office machine's malfunctioning? Does it smell fresh because the ventilation is working in an empty building? Or does it smell stale because the ventilation is inadequate? Is there a faint odor of cigarette smoke to suggest that someone was here recently? Smell can give the readers lots of clues.

And the oft-neglected sense of *taste*! There are situations in stories where this, too, can add an interesting element. What if the character puts his or her finger into a small spill on a desk, then smells it, and then tastes it? Description of the sugary-sweet coffee taste can add an interesting element.

The more details you provide, the clearer the images for your readers, and the more they might begin to feel involved, really *involved* in that story.

But of course, the character cannot *be* your readers; your character may react to situations quite differently from the way in which many of your readers would.

If there can be one characteristic, though, which ties all of us together as human beings, it would seem to be imperfection. Not one of us is without flaws; no one makes the right decisions all the time; no one is perfect in all things. And so your character should be this way, too. Show your character's indecision, doubt. Let him/her have admirable traits, but let there be room for the readers to wonder whether or not the character will be able to find a solution, to meet the challenge and win.

We win some, we lose some. It's part of life; it *is* life. So let your characters be imperfect like the rest of us. But, too, let him or her *learn* from the situation, and grow.

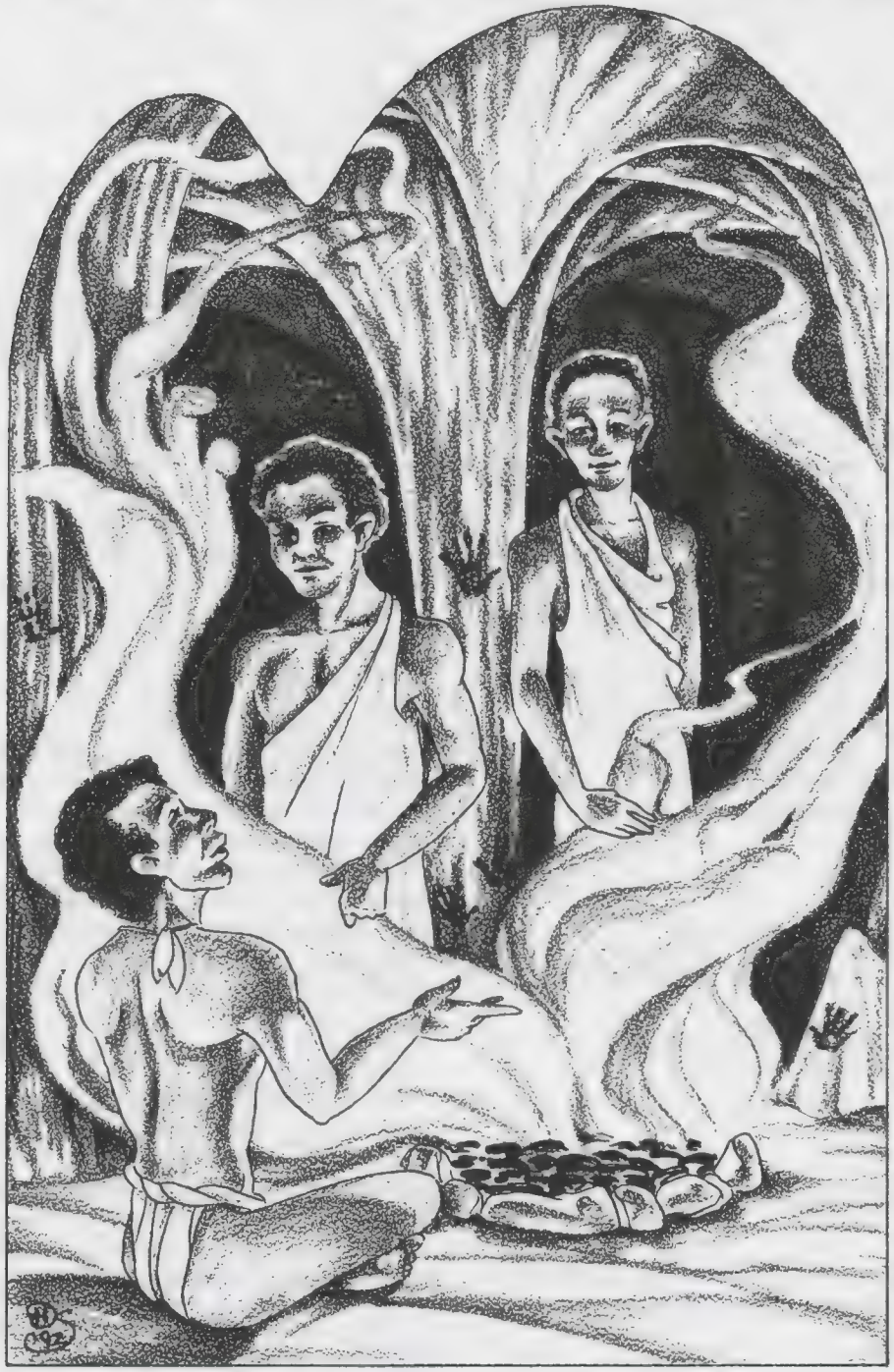
Because that's what the rest of us imperfect people hope to do, too.

Yes, your story is fantasy. But it must also seem *real* to your readers.

❧

Lynne Armstrong-Jones has had stories published in *FANTASY Magazine*. She lives in Canada.

NAMING THE NUMBER



Artwork by Diana Harlan Stein

Tük-wa, Guardian of All Things Sacred, squatted in the dim cave. Light danced from the embers of the tribe's fire, throwing distorted shadows over the rough walls. Tendrils of foul-smelling smoke wreathed Tük-wa's head. He awaited the two, chosen for their mental alertness, wise in spite of their adolescence.

A large figure blocked the light from the cave entrance. The silhouette revealed powerful shoulders and thick legs.

Tük-wa spoke. "Enter, Yark."

Size belied the boy's youthfulness. Yark nimbly seated himself, yet his frame loomed above Tük-wa. He inclined his head. "Guardian."

Another figure stood in the entrance. Tall and wiry, he appeared as slight as Yark was solid.

"Enter, Eerim."

by Kevin F. Kerr

The youngster crouched next to the fire and swiftly bobbed his head. "Guardian."

Tük-wa scratched briefly in the dirt. The ceremony had no rites, no ritual. He began speaking, still staring at the floor. "You are chosen by elders. Only one will stay, to learn the ways of the Guardian."

He paused and looked each boy in the face. Yark's eyes glinted like obsidian, his mouth set in a half-smile. Eerim blinked in the acrid smoke, his grey eyes watering.

"I have only one test to see who is fit. Name me the numbers."

Yark's smile widened into a grin. Eerim coughed briefly and crossed his arms.

"Yark, you go first."

The boy's eagerness seemed ready to burst. He thrust out his right hand, extended the first finger. "One," he barked. "For pointing. The spear."

Tük-wa nodded, then looked at Eerim.

The boy stretched out his hand and uncurled the first finger, then the second. "Two," he said quietly. "For the tall one. The tree."

Tük-wa sat back on his haunches. "Proceed."

Yark straightened his second and third finger. "Three. For the bending one. The fishing stick."

Eerim held out four fingers. "Four. For cutting. The knife."

Yark thrust out his thumb. "Five. For integrity. The rope."

Eerim paused, then lifted his left hand and forefinger. "Six. For grasping. The bird."

"Seven," Yark shouted, raising his left middle finger. "For power. The bear."

"Eight..." Eerim faltered. He stared dumbly at his left hand.

Yark glanced sideways. "Eight." His lip curled. "For gentleness. The lamb."

Eerim looked quickly at Tük-wa, who stared back silently. The boy tried to hide a grin of his own. "Nine," he said, raising his little finger. "For slyness. The snake."

Yark's chest swelled. "Ten," he said defiantly. "For fierceness. The wolverine."

Tük-wa waited as Eerim closed his eyes.

The boy sat, unmoving, for several heartbeats. Then he stood and moved his left foot forward. "Eleven." His voice was firm and clear. "For swiftness. The deer."

Yark looked unsure of himself. His gaze lowered to his own feet, and his brow furrowed in concentration. He remained hunkered down for a long time. Finally his head came up, a look of surprise spreading across his features. He jumped to his feet and kicked his right leg in the air. "Twelve!" he cried. "Twelve, for strength. The mammoth!"

Tük-wa sat pondering the boys as the smoke swirled lazily around his head. "Very good," he said at last. "But does either of you know another number?"

Eerim met Yark's heavy gaze and did not flinch. The large boy glowered, not willing to look away either, until he turned suddenly on Tük-wa and laughed.

"There is no other number."

Tük-wa did not stir. Only his eyes moved to regard Eerim.

The thin boy stood straight and tall. He looked at the ceiling, his eyes focused on something more distant. When he spoke, his voice was remote, a whisper. "There is something beyond. Maybe it has no number, for it is unseen."

Silence filled the cave, punctuated only by the hiss of the embers.

Yark snorted. "Rubbish. Even old women do not speak such nonsense."

Eerim waited, hanging his head quietly. Eventually Tük-wa stood and placed his hand on Eerim's shoulder.

"The unseen has a number indeed. Its name is Thirteen." He turned and prodded Yark with his right forefinger. "Leave us. You will never see beyond yourself."

❧

KEVIN F. KERR is a member of the Fairwood Writers Group, has previously been published in the small press magazine *Midnight Zoo*, and will have a story appearing in Jerry Pournelle's upcoming anthology **HIGH TECH WARS**. He is a graduate in English and History from the University of Washington as well as being a graduate of the Clarion West writers workshop. He currently works as a technical writer and lives in Auburn, Washington, with his wife, Janis, and their three children.

DIANA HARLAN STEIN has illustrated everything from calendars and T-shirts to gamebooks. Her work can be seen at many science fiction conventions.

The Results of the Cauldron

The voting results for issue #`19 are as follows:

Stories:

- 1st Place: **"Dreambridge" by Janny Wurts**
- 2nd Place: **"The Griffin" by Barbara Rosen**
- 3rd Place: **"Mad Sally" by Patricia Duffy Novak**

Artwork:

- 1st Place: **Janny Wurts for "Dreambridge"**
- 2nd Place: **Gail Butler for "The Griffin"**
- 3rd Place: **Armand Cabrera for "Butterfly"**

Congratulations to all the winners!
To vote for your favorites in *this* issue, use the ballot on page 64.
Your interest and enthusiasm mean a lot to us at

FANTASY
Magazine

The Bag

by Sabina Pinto

She walked regally down the filthy, neglected streets like a queen walking in her imperial gardens. The broken bricks and scattered trash and garbage that lay profusely along the pavements and streets were glorious flowers blooming for her alone. The stench of the city was to her the beautiful aroma of thousands of flowers. Those who loitered on the corners or slept uneasily in the dark doorways were the royal gardeners having an afternoon break. The buildings they leaned against, although crumbling and derelict, were to the lady mighty trees: oaks, pines, willows, birches, maples, and others, all standing dignified and majestic along the walkways of the magnificent gardens.

The lady was very tall for an old woman, tall and stately and proud even though she carried all of her belongings in a strangely colored, very heavy-looking bag, one that she held very tightly in her two withered hands. It was not the ordinary paper or plastic shopping bag that one normally sees streetpeople carrying; this bag was strong and heavy, a bag that at one time might have been used in the Old South. Whatever it was, she held onto it as though her very life depended on what was inside. No one had ever seen the contents of the bag; she would never allow that. No one else had ever touched the bag.

It was a cold December morning when she died. Fine white snow covered the streets and long blades of ice hung from doorways and windows. Some of the other homeless found her stiffened, ragmuffled body lying at the foot of the steps of the neighborhood church. Her last thoughts must have been for redemption from the Almighty, but it seemed she had never quite reached the church door. A silent ambulance took the body away, and in their haste to remove the body, the paramedics left the bag on the steps.

One of the younger streetpeople in the small crowd was the first to notice the bag. He had seen the old woman carry it like her life itself was inside the thing. Picturing it filled with money and jewelry, he snatched up the bag and ran as fast as his undernourished body would allow. However, he was not fast enough to outrun some of the others: about a dozen of them followed him rapidly down the street. They met halfway to the corner, and a weak fight began. All were trying for the prize; all were in a hurry to see what was inside the bag. In the struggle, the bag somehow was freed and flew open into the gutter. The streetpeople rushed to behold the wonderful contents of the bag. Jostling each other and slipping on the thin coating of ice, they reached the curb to find a dreadful surprise: the bag that had promised them wonder and hope was totally empty. Some of the people walked away in frustration, but others lingered to peer longingly into the ancient bag.

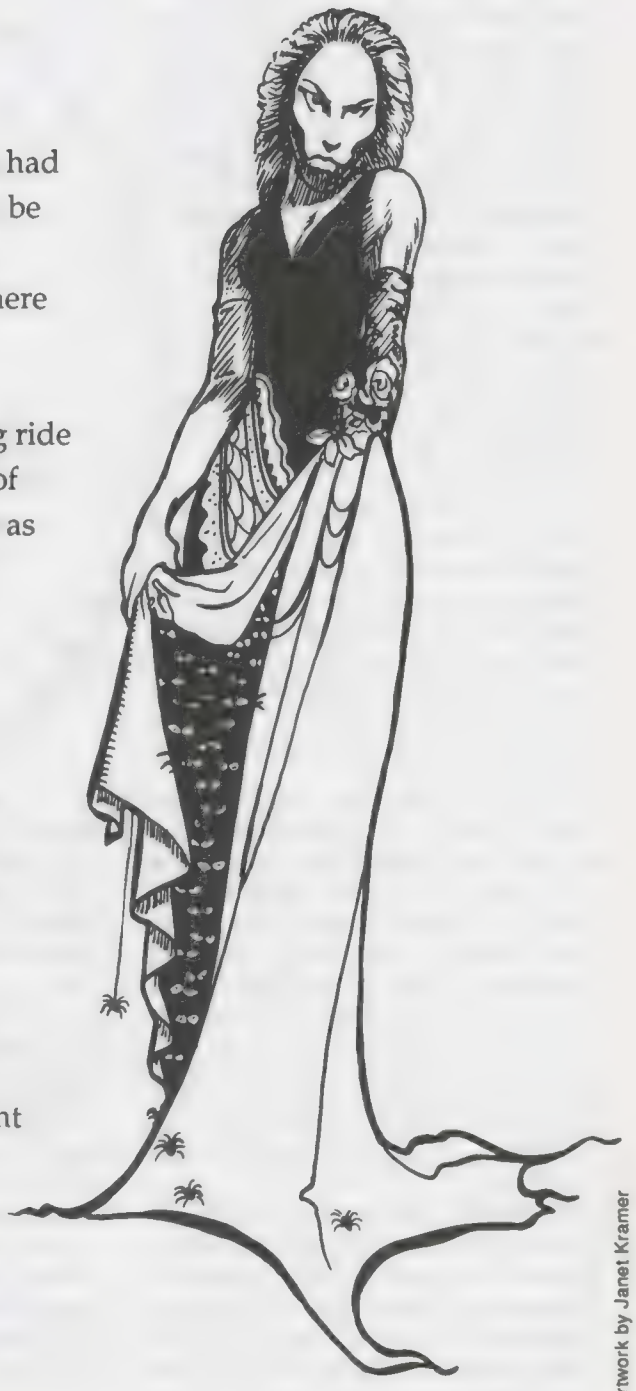
There are about a dozen of them. They are all old and disheveled, but they all walk like kings and queens strolling through royal gardens, seeing and hearing and smelling things that no others can. Stared at as though they had all gone completely insane, the strange people walk in silence, oblivious to their sad and terrible surroundings, walking tall and stately and almost happy. The old man who walks in the exact center of the group holds tightly with his two withered hands a very old, strangely colored bag.

❧

Sabina Pinto grew up in Philadelphia and attended La Salle University. She was a professional dancer before settling in to raise a family. She has been writing for her own amusement most of her life but only recently began submitting stories for publication. In addition to "The Bag", she has published poetry and other fiction.

Michael Kucharski has worked as a professional illustrator and graphic artist in the advertising and journalism fields for nearly two decades. His work has appeared in such diverse forms as book covers, game boxes, calendars, medical illustrations, and posters as well as magazine illustrations for sf publications such as *Midnight Zoo* and *Pandora* and various non-sf magazines. In recent years he has begun showing his work in art shows at science fiction conventions. Michael lives in Wyandotte, Michigan.

Roses



Artwork by Janet Kramer

by Deborah Burros

They buried her underneath one of her rosebushes.

Her husband and his mistress did this easily: The rose bed had been cultivated recently, so its soil was still loose and would be expected to look disturbed, and the garden was otherwise deserted, for it was supposed to be Lady Rose's retreat, so there were no witnesses – except the roses.

These roses had come from her kinswomen's estates a long ride to the south. Homesick, Lady Rose had tended the bundles of jagged sticks, yearning for these roses: Soft as silk and white as milk but with a fragrance headier than wine. She had had nothing else on which to lavish her attention.

Certainly not her husband. On their wedding night, six months earlier, Lord Sleet had disparaged her as being "more thorn than rose." Since then, he had spent his nights and as much as possible of his days with his mistress, Jade. (Not that this had surprised anyone — least of all the bride and groom — as the marriage had been blatantly one of convenience to gain respectability for her rich family and wealth for his impoverished but pedigreed line. Lord Sleet had always been vocal about his dislikes, which included bony, angular, whey-faced women. Lady Rose had kept silent about her dislike of blustering men who disliked her.)

However, Lady Rose had not been able to remain silent that morning in early summer when she had

encountered Lord Sleet and Jade in her garden – *and he picking her first blossoms and presenting them to his mistress.*

"You go too far! Enough that you toast each other with my marriage cup. Enough that you embrace each other on the linens I embroidered. But now you must take my most private joy — the *only* joy I have had since I came here — and violate *it*!" Anger had swelled her bosom and crimsoned her face, but her husband still had not considered her beautiful.

"So my Rose seeks to jab me with pointed remarks," he had sneered. Lounging against him and smiling her siren's smile, Jade had plucked the flowers to pieces and let them drift, petal by petal, onto her gown of jade-green silk.

Provoked to the limits of her endurance, Lady Rose had snatched the remaining blossoms from Jade's grasp; Jade had cried out as thorns raked her soft hands and drew a few drops of blood. Enraged by this slight harm to his mistress, Lord Sleet had cut down his wife with the dagger he had used to cut the roses.

They buried her underneath one of her rosebushes. To hide the murder further, they claimed that Lady Rose had run off with a troubadour. This absurdity was loyally echoed by all Lord Sleet's courtiers and retainers, save the gardener. Even Lady Rose's kinswomen did not seem to challenge the story — much to Lord Sleet's relief, for they had wealth, the one power he acknowledged, and were somehow slightly disreputable, which made him wary of them, although, before, their gold had distracted him from the details.

The night of the full moon, her kinswomen secretly assembled in the oldest tower of their oldest estate, unlocked a trunk that had been copied from Pandora's box, and removed from it another heirloom, a silver bowl. They filled this silver bowl with rose water and gazed into it to scry Lady Rose's whereabouts. And they saw where she was.

Although they mourned, unplaiting their raven-black hair and keening like sea gulls, they knew that *they* did not need to avenge her, but merely to bide their time.

For the year following the murder, only the gardener would go into Lady Rose's garden. Lord Sleet and Jade avoided the place except in their nightmares, where white rosebuds turned into white skulls. Their nightmares worsened as the wheel of the year came back around, so that on the actual anniversary of the murder, they sought to postpone sleep until the next day with a nightlong feast.

At midnight, the gardener marched into the hall, bearing an armful of red roses, which he distributed amongst the courtiers. Bowing, he presented the last two blooms to Lord Sleet and Jade: "Here are roses from Her Ladyship's garden, m'lord."

Lord Sleet peered up from his wine. "All the roses in her garden were *white*," he snapped, eyeing them and the gardener suspiciously. "These roses are *red* — as red as heart's blood." Jade flinched at his choice of words; he glowered.

The gardener bowed again. "True, m'lord, but this year one of the white rosebushes flowered red for some reason."

Lord Sleet and Jade exchanged nervous looks. The gardener took advantage of their distraction to slip away to the stables and ride south.

When the fragrance of roses had filled the hall, in walked Lady Rose.

Lord Sleet dropped his goblet. Jade screamed once. The courtiers fell silent.

Lady Rose approached her husband and his mistress. "Have you nothing to say to me after my long absence?"

Her husband, inane from shock, could only blurt out, "You are beautiful now!" Indeed, with fresh rose petals for flesh, how could she be otherwise?

She curtsied, rustling her leafy dress. "So genteel you have become... Surely it was but an oversight that you did not invite my companions. As lady of this manor, I have made it my concern to invite them to the feast."

Companions? Ostentatiously noting the lateness of the hour, people began to rise from their chairs.

"But my guests are about to arrive," said Lady Rose. "You *must* stay. I insist."

Out from the velvety folds of the red roses swarmed spiders as red as the wax seal on a death warrant; people immediately sat back down, edging as far away as possible from the lethal creatures. Lord Sleet moaned; Jade whimpered.

The companions of Lady Rose entered the hall, wriggling with anticipation to join the feast.

At sunrise, Lady Rose's kinswomen arrived, having anticipated that something like this would happen. They surveyed the beslimed hall, stepping around the gobbets of flesh that had been scattered by Lady Rose's companions, the frenzied worms.

Her kinswomen entered her garden. By a bush of red roses was a mound of white rose petals with Lady Rose's bones nestled inside.

Before her kinswomen returned home, they had a tomb of white marble built among the roses for her. The gardener became its caretaker. (Deciding respectability had too high a price, Lady Rose's kinswomen stopped hiding the family's talent for sorcery that went as deep as the bone.)

Once a year, Lady Rose leaves her tomb to put on rose-petal flesh and live for a summer's night.

Roses are red,
The Lady is dead;
Roses are white,
She walks in the night. ❧

Deborah Burros has a Master's degree in Library Science and has worked as a copy editor and copywriter for science publishers. "Roses" is her third sale. She has had stories published previously in Sword and Sorceress VIII and in Issue #17 of this magazine.

Janet Kramer, when last heard from, was working as a graphics artist for Sun MicroSystems. She has also done illustrations for earlier issues of *FANTASY Magazine*, computer animation projects, and game illustrations for LucasFilms. She lives in San Carlos, California.

Artwork by Janet Kramer

Night Stand

by Frank Tuttle

Mallara followed the Lake Road as far the second well-marker, turned right as the Mayor had said, and found herself in the old Vorlon apple orchard well before noon. The sun blazed, high and alone in a flawless blue sky. Birds darted and sang, riding a lazy breeze that smelled of honeysuckle and bell-flower. Mallara found a patch of shade, watched the birds wheel and the flowers sway, and forced herself to stop trembling.

"Burn," she said. The air before her face suddenly shimmered, blurring like the air just above a hot, dry stretch of road.

"Yes, Mistress?" said the shimmer.

"I'm being followed. How many and how far?"

"Twelve. About a quarter of a mile back, just behind the poplars. It's the Mayor and his retinue. One has a telescope. He's made three lewd remarks about your backside."

Mallara clenched her teeth and counted silently to ten. "Have you seen the villa?" she said at last.

"I have, Lady," said Burn, no humor in his tone. "It is as the Mayor said, down to the three standing walls, the huge old fountain, and the stunted oaks in the yard."

"And?"

"And it looks more like an Elvish painting than a haunted house. No indications of persistent spell effects or habitation by discorporeal entities."

"I should be relieved," said Mallara.

"You should."

"I'm not. Are you?"

"Not in the least," said Burn. "I've got a bad feeling about this, Mistress. I think yon Mayor neglected to mention a few things when he hired you to Cleanse the place. They wouldn't be out strolling in the weeds unless they were expecting a show."

Mallara glared. "If it's a show they want..."

"Save it for the spooks, Mistress," said Burn. "We may need it." The shimmer darted closer and his voice fell to a whisper. "If it'll make you feel better, though, there's a hornet's nest about thirty paces from the loudmouth with the telescope. Why don't I just..."

"No, Burn," said Mallara, sighing. "You were right. We are professionals. Professionals don't waste their efforts sparring with imbeciles."

"As you wish," said Burn. "Why don't I just scout ahead, maybe have another look around the villa?"

"Good idea," said Mallara. "Let's get this done." She stepped into the sunlight and squinted. Burn darted skyward and vanished.

Mallara had taken three steps when a chorus of screams and frantic thrashings erupted from behind the stand of poplars. Over the din, Mallara imagined she could hear the buzzing of a thousand angry hornets.

Burn sailed by, humming contentedly. "Insects have no sense of humor," he said cheerfully. "Wonderful tactical sense, though."

"Burn..."

"On my way."

Mallara hid her grin with a glare and marched out of the orchard. The Vorlon villa lay another two hours' hike away, and with it Mallara's first real test of her sorcerous skills — a Cleansing. What was it Master Wesseven had always said about Cleansings? Ah, yes — "The first one is always the worst — until the next one."

The old carriage track led into a shadowed thicket of pines. Mallara took a deep breath and marched into the darkness.

The lawn, once well-tended and flat, was a wild, dense place of meadow-grass and wild roses. A wide stone walkway flanked by brilliant red-and-yellow fireflowers wandered through the yard, passing beneath a trio of dead, shadeless oaks and beside an empty fountain before vanishing amid the weeds.

From the center of the wild lawn rose the house, its stones bleached and glaring like old bones weathered in a desert. Only three leaning, crumbling walls, a shattered stump of chimney, and a single ornate marble door-casing remained.

Mallara gazed out over the gently waving flowers and whispered a Word. The spell tangled in her fingers leaped away toward the villa like a bolt of lazy, silent lightning. The spell wandered among the ruins while strange shadows played in its wake.

Mallara spoke another Word. The spell

Artwork by Vincent Di Fate

bobbed back to her and settled in her hand, whispering.

The spell fell silent, fading away until the sorceress gripped only emptiness.

"Well?" said Burn.

"Nothing," said Mallara. "No signs of supernatural Presence. No lingering thaumaturgic charges. No arcane traces at all. They didn't even use housekeeping magic — just a single wardstone, and that fell twenty years ago."

Burn blurred, darting to steer away a vampire-fly flapping its way toward Mallara's neck. "No spooks. No leftover kitchen magic slamming doors in the night. No traveling wizards careless with trinkets. What, then?"

Mallara shrugged, rose, and stretched her arms toward the sky. A bloated sun loomed just over the line of black oaks to the west; it would set soon, and she would be alone — except for Burn.

Mallara shivered. "Let's make camp," she said. "The Mayor said the lights only come out at night. Perhaps then we'll see something."

Burn harried another vampire-fly away. "As you wish. I'll check the well again. Mind the pests, Mistress." Burn vanished, scattering jaybirds as he flew.

Mallara closed her eyes, held her right hand palm-up before her, and whispered. A pinprick of light appeared, grew, and became a transparent sphere as it enveloped the sorceress and her equipment. The sphere vanished as Mallara gasped out the final syllable.

A thirsty vampire-fly met the invisible edge of the barrier and exploded with a small sharp pop. Mallara pulled a cushion from the tiny pack, made herself comfortable upon it, and unlocked her equipment with a Word and a wave.

"Forty minutes until sunset," said the clock at her feet.

"And then what?" asked Mallara. The clock ignored her. She watched the shadows lengthen.

The sun sank behind a lurid black and crimson sheet of clouds that stole quickly across the western sky. The breeze became a wind, a wind that smelled of rain and deep forest and far-off lightning. The forsaken lawn pitched and tossed, the flowers all but hidden amid the weeds.

The sun disappeared. Mallara sent another pastel tangle of light into the clearing. When it returned, she sent another. Both found shadows and windswept weeds and nothing else.

"Burn," said Mallara. "Report."

Fat, cold drops of rain began to spatter against the stones. A low, steady hiss and sizzle began in the air above the sorceress as the rain encountered the barrier and became steam.

"Burn?"

The rain fell faster and harder. The wind crashed through the trees, sheets of rain on its heels. What had been shadow became utter darkness, without even lightning to challenge it.

Mallara shouted a Word, her fingers a blur. A fist-sized globe of daylight burst from her hand and rose to hang immobile above her. With another Word, the globe exploded, filling the clearing with a white, harsh glare that neither wind nor rain could expel.

"Burn!"

The wind howled, as if enraged. Lightning shattered an oak at the far side of the clearing.

Mallara's barrier trailed gouts of steam that swirled in the wind like a tattered shroud. Shapes seemed to move through the racing fog — hulking, man-sized shapes...

"It's only a thunderstorm," said Mallara aloud. "A storm and nothing else. Burn!"

The barrier rang like a struck bell. Mallara whirled, but saw only steam and whipping sheets of rain. The barrier pealed again and again, repelling blows only a sorcerer — or something equally powerful — could inflict. Mallara spun, a deadly Word half-formed on her lips, her hands bathed in sheets of fire.

The lawn before her was empty but for the storm and the harsh white glare of the fist-sized sun above. Blows rang against the barrier constantly, drowning out the thunder and sizzle of the rain. The barrier flashed, visible for an instant as a silver orb blotched by crimson, trailing sparks with the steam.

Mallara closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and negated the killing spell. A different Word restored the weakened barrier. The blows came stronger and faster, frantic now, more desperate than furious.

Mallara kneeled, pulled an iron-shod staff from a black slit in the air, and began to sing, her voice low but steady. The staff grew warm, then cold, and warm again, and it was done.

The blows stopped. Mallara leaned upon the staff and peered out into the rain. Her ears rang, and her pulse thundered, and it was a long time before she could hear the rain or the grumble of thunder again.

When it spoke, as she knew it would, the storm dwindled to a mere rain and the wind to a tired, wet breeze that shuffled aimlessly through the soaked grasses.

"What have you done?" said a voice in the darkness.

"I have sealed the well," replied Mallara. "You may not pass there. You will remain here — until the sun rises."

Silence. Mallara waited while her claim was tested. A high, thin shriek rode the night. Mallara shivered and gripped the staff tightly.

"Take away the light," said the voice. "Take it away."

"Where is my friend?" said Mallara. "The shimmer. What have you done with him?"

"Take it *away!*"

The barrier shook. Mallara whispered, raised the staff. The weeds and the leaning walls and the ring of trees were suddenly touched with fire. Mallara waited until the screaming stopped and lowered the staff.

"Where is the shimmer?"

"I will bring it back," whimpered the voice. "Back. Now. Take away the light."

Mallara shook her head. "No."

The barrier hissed softly before Mallara, as though being gently prodded with cautious fingers. The sorceress stared ahead, her gaze calm, her mind racing. The well is the door — but to what? A forgotten barrow? A tomb of the Old Ones? The crypt of an Elvish sorcerer?

Or something else — something sunlight would not destroy?

A dim shadow fell on the glistening pavement just outside the barrier. Above it, a darkening in the air grew solid.

Mallara gripped the staff to keep her hands from shaking. The shadows coalesced. Mallara began to see hints of light within, and the outlines of a face. Golden eyes — wide, luminous, sad eyes — met hers, and grew larger, grew closer...

Her Word came out in a desperate rasp. The eyes and the half-formed angelic face vanished behind the suddenly opaque barrier. A fusillade of enraged blows fell against the shield.

Mallara coaxed a tangle of lightning from the staff, soothed it with low, soft words, and sent it roaming across the shell of magic that enveloped her. The assault intensified. Another Word silenced the thunder that rocked the barrier.

The milky white of the barrier rippled directly in front of Mallara. A blurred face appeared, leering and snarling, mad yellow eyes alight with rage. It smiled, revealing two rows of jagged, curved fangs.

"Feeble, soft," it said. "Soft. Weak. Tear and rip and shred and..."

A burning skein of lightning erupted from the barrier and exploded against the face.

The barrier rippled and was whole. The furious pounding continued, but the face did not reappear.

Mallara leaned on the staff, pulled a glowing glass wand from the air before her, and concentrated on holding the barrier together against the more subtle attack begun silently when the face appeared.

"Sunrise in two hours and thirty-seven minutes," said the clock. The barrier shook. A sound like stones cracking rose up despite the Word of silence.

Mallara's Words ran together like the words in some grim, discordant song.

"Sunrise in fourteen minutes," said the clock.

The attack ceased. Mallara held the web of power together, bracing it for some massive final explosion of fury.

Her heartbeats raced by. For the first time since the storm began, she began to be aware of her own sensations — the ragged breathing, the throbbing pulse, the dull aches in her arms and her jaw.

"Ten minutes," said the clock.

The silence continued. Except...

"Mistress," said a small voice from just outside the barrier. "It's Burn. Let me in."

Mallara's concentration faltered. Could it be?

"I'm damaged," said the voice. "The entity nearly drained me. I can't pass the barrier. Please, Mistress. Open a portal. It's coming closer.

"Please."

Mallara shook her head. "No."

"Please! It's here!"

Mallara lifted her staff and hurled a gout of power through the barrier. Something on the other side howled.

"I am a Sorceress," said Mallara, her voice shaking. "Not a hedge-witch to be misled with childish pranks."

The blows began anew, and with them sobs and half-formed pleas for mercy. Mallara sank to her knees, held the staff before her, and waited for the sun. Burn's voice hung in her mind.

The entity knew Burn's voice.

Mallara doubted she'd ever hear it again.

"Two minutes until sunrise," said the clock.

The barrier shook and rang and shed fire in sheets. Every strand of power strained against the next. Hostile magic roamed the shell, probing, searing, rending...

"One minute."

The attack intensified, becoming a single torrential explosion of power. The ends of Mallara's staff glowed and dripped molten iron. The glass wand drooped and trailed smoke. The air around her sparked and hissed. A small bell rang.

"Sunrise."

The pounding stopped. There was a long, despairing wail, and a brightness against the barrier, and a silence.

The wand fell from Mallara's hand. She crouched, gasping, and watched the glass become a puddle on the stones.

The barrier wobbled. Bulges and dents whirled across it. Mallara grew dizzy and turned her eyes to the ground.

"One minute past sunrise," said the clock.

Mallara rose to her feet. Every bone, every joint, every muscle ached and burned. Thirst rose up, competing with the pain of moving for an instant. A throbbing behind her temples began just as she reached for the canteen at her waist.

Now, to see the sun...

A fist-sized blur darted through a rend in the barrier.

"The clock — it got through to the clock. The sun isn't up yet!"

Mallara stared.

"The barrier is failing," said Burn, his movements jerky and erratic, his voice fading. "Mistress..."

Mallara felt her arms lift the staff, and she heard herself croak out a Word. The barrier shook, reeling under a blow meant to shatter it like so much glass.

Mallara held on until the throbbing in her temple grew louder than the roar beyond. A flash blinded her, and she felt the staff fall from her hands, and she realized she was falling with it just as the darkness took her.

"Mistress?"

Mallara stirred. That hurt, so she became still and drifted away again. The voice spoke again, and again, waking her each time she found comfort in the shadows.

"Mistress," it shouted from — inside? — her right ear, "wake UP!"

Artwork by Vincent Di Fate

She woke. There was a sound — like an egg frying across the room — and the familiar voice muttered curses. Mallara opened her eyes.

She lay on the stones, surrounded by smoking mounds of scorched earth and a ring of charred, limbless tree trunks. A fat afternoon sun shone down, unconcerned by the devastation. A cool breeze rushed south, its skirts filled with smoke.

Around her, in a ragged circle, lay dozens of charred vampire-flies. Another fell smoking to join the rest while Mallara watched.

"Four hundred and ninety-three," muttered the shimmer, who darted closer. "Ah, you're conscious. Get up and do something before the bugs finish what Yellow Teeth started."

Mallara rolled over.

"That's it," said Burn. "Now sit up and look victorious before the Mayor and his telescope arrive. You'll never collect our fee stretched out like that."

Mallara sat up. Her head reeled, memories a whirlwind. Drink, she thought. Water first. Then I'll remember.

Burn hovered near, an angry buzzing in his midst. "They lied to us, Mistress. That was a Shadow, or worse — one with plenty of history behind it. They knew, or at least suspected. I say our fee ought to triple."

Mallara drained the canteen. "A pact is a pact, Burn. You know that. We'll take the fee we asked, no more. Then we'll rest. I expect our services will be required again very, very soon."

"Our services?" said the shimmer. "What services?"

"It seems the villagers are going to have a problem with hornets," said Mallara. "Huge ones. Angry ones. Thousands of them..."

"That isn't fair, Mistress," said Burn. "I'll get started right away." The shimmer vanished.

Mallara smiled. The sun on her face was warm and bright. Birds sang, albeit from a safe distance. Her head grew clearer, and her aches lessened.

She heard the Mayor and his retinue long before they entered the smoldering meadow. She allowed them to survey the ruins for a moment before she rose and turned to meet them.

"Welcome, gentlemen," said the Sorceress, a wide grin on her sooty face. "I've been expecting you. But before we discuss my payment — which of you owns the telescope?"

❧

Frank Tuttle is twenty-nine and works as a computer operator for the University of Mississippi, although he notes that his other skills include carpentry – he built the house he lives in. He says, "When I'm not working or writing, I'm reading. My tastes run the gamut from fantasy to science fiction to hard-boiled detective stories. In fact, the novel I'm working on (tentatively entitled **A LONG WAY FROM HEAVEN**) is a murder mystery set 900 light years from Earth." Frank has been writing for eleven years, and "Night Stand" is his first sale.

Vincent DiFate worked in animated films before turning to freelance artwork. He received a Hugo as Best Professional Artist in 1979 as well as the Skylark and the Lensman Awards. He is regarded as one of the world's major illustrators of futuristic themes, including astronomical and aerospace themes for the National Geographic Society, CBS television, and NASA. He is a past president of ASFA and was the Artist Guest of Honor at the 1992 Worldcon.

Artwork by Vincent Di Fate

The Basilisk

Lucy Cohen Schmeidler

Jorry was not a basilisk hunter, neither by profession nor by hobby. He had come out here because he needed a break — any break — from the brooding that had consumed him for almost two days. He wasn't trying to get himself killed, but his gloom was such that he wasn't trying terribly hard to stay alive. Tired of thinking about himself, he considered the puzzle of the basilisk.

A troop of Lord Grondin's men had chased it up into the hills, where a sudden downpour had weighed down their protective clothes and turned their goggles opaque. Tomorrow, or the day after, they would return and finish it off.

Jorry remembered the soldiers as they had ridden past his house that morning, some of them actually drunk, shouting encouragement to each other to mask their fear. It was not an assignment they liked.

They were led, he had heard, by a tracker with a couple of giant weasels, which were reputedly immune to the basilisk's glare. He wondered what the creatures were like. He had never seen a basilisk, but he had seen weasels: small creatures for all their fierceness, not likely foes of a monster that turned grown men to stone.

Jorry's outfit was makeshift. He wore an ordinary shirt and trousers, boots and gloves, but the garments were tucked into each other with care. He had wrapped his head in a scarf, the bottom edge of which hung loose enough to give him a view of his toes and a few inches of path. He would be dead, of course, if the basilisk sneaked up to his feet and gazed straight up, but that seemed on the whole unlikely.

He bore a rough, unmagical staff that served, along with his limited view, to keep him from losing his footing or the path. He could feel the basilisk's presence somewhere up ahead. He had a sense of closeness, and not much light. A cave?

It was this sensitivity to the presence of others that had gotten him in trouble in the first place. Two days ago he had been down by the lake with Liara, doing nothing, content merely to sit with an arm around her shoulders, letting everything slip from his mind but his awareness of her. And gradually, his vision changed; the colors of land and sky were subtly different, and he viewed the lake from a slightly altered perspective, feeling, with mild excitement, the warmth of his arm around her, as if someone was hugging his own back.

It had seemed both incredible and utterly glorious, and he had tried, haltingly, to describe it to her.

"It's not a nice joke," she had said, and then, when he persisted, she became angry. "It's ugly. I don't believe you, but it's still ugly. You make me feel like I've been invaded."

She had pulled away, and he was back in his own perspective, but he could feel her revulsion as clearly as he felt the breeze against his face.

"You're wrong," he had said. "How have you been invaded? I haven't touched you; it's not as if I was controlling you or putting thoughts into your mind."

But despite his protest, he felt unclean. And there was irony, too. Although he knew she liked him, he had been hesitant to touch her, uncertain of her reaction, yet in that moment of sharing, he had felt her desire as well as his own.

He sensed the basilisk up ahead, a strange, cold mind, seeking warmth, seeking food, but feeling uneasy, remembering the hunt. Jorry moved in the direction of the mind.

The awareness of others had always been his, and until he was seven or eight, he had assumed it was a sense that everyone had, but it had never seemed particularly important. At most, it had kept the neighborhood bullies from taking him unawares. But it had always been vague, a sense of presence, a trickle of emotion. Nor had he ever been tempted to try mindshifting. Until Liara.

In the two days since then, the sense had intensified, so that he had felt the soldiers riding past his house as a howling mob. It didn't matter that, under the pressure of guilt, he would gladly have lost the ability altogether.

The basilisk was close now, close enough to hear his approach. He felt its uneasiness shift into fear, and something else.

What else? Not a tensing for attack; none of the excitement of the chase, the preparation to kill. What he sensed felt more like reluctance, withdrawal. Re-

Artwork by Nicholas Jainschigg

pugnance.

He wondered. During all the hunt it had made no attempt to attack. There had been rumors that the creature was either sick or badly wounded, or that it was no true basilisk at all.

He approached slowly, feeling his way, letting its mind occupy more and more of his consciousness. It was very much aware of him, and clearly wanted him to disappear.

For the first time in his life, he tried not merely to listen but to project.

Calm, he thought. *Calm and safety*. The basilisk remained tense, but it was just possible that it had become slightly less frightened. Words, though, seemed inadequate for what he wanted. He needed an image. He tried to picture it relaxing, basking in a warm place, dreaming of...something tasty. A rabbit, perhaps?

Too soft and wet. All mush, really, except for the bones. Jorry's sudden gasp of understanding broke the connection.

He started over again, visualizing warmth and security, and mouth-tempting, petrified rabbit. Still warm.

He felt the basilisk respond, fear giving way to anticipation. It was as if he, the human, was gone, and in his place...

Jorry fought panic. Quickly he erased the rabbit from the picture. Only sun and rocks, warmth and quiet.

Disappointment, followed by acceptance. Jorry inched forward.

The smell was non-human, non-animal, and shot through Jorry like an arrow of despair. It was steel and lightning and suffocating dust, and gut-wrenching panic. He wanted to be gone, now, as intensely as the basilisk had wanted him to leave, but that very desire forged a perverse bond with the creature that kept him from bolting.

A long time later, Jorry almost stumbled over the basilisk, huddled under an overhang of rock. He felt dazed from the peace and calm he kept projecting. The basilisk was motionless, its long, reptilian tail like an ugly lump of mottled earth. For all that he was sure it was asleep, he avoided looking anywhere near its eyes.

The tail, he thought, must be at least four feet long, and he guessed its total length at a minimum of six feet. He tried to imagine a weasel big enough to attack it, and gave up. That was the hunters' business, not his.

He could see one clawed foot and the end of a vestigial wing, covered with brownish feathers. It was a freak, neither snake nor fowl; alien, awesome, and ugly.

His curiosity was satisfied, and his feeling of recklessness had dissipated. But he felt a bond with the grotesque creature and was sorry to leave it to the soldiers. He knew that it was a pest, a danger, and should be destroyed for the safety of humanity, but he knew, also, that none of that was the basilisk's fault.

He thought of blindfolding it, to render it harmless. The soldiers would still come, though, and deprived of fear, they would torture it the more, to make up for their fear in the past.

He projected one last image of safety, knowing it for a lie, and turned back toward the village.

When he reached his house he paused outside, located his parents and sister in the kitchen, and went quietly through to his room in back. He wasn't aware of doing anything unusual, and his family had long ceased wondering how, when he wanted to be alone, he was so good at getting in and out without being seen. It was simply Jorry's way.

He lay down and tried to relax, to think of something pleasant, but his thoughts kept going back to the ugly creature in the hills and to the soldiers in the village. He could picture the men, crowded into Quinly's Cat, boasting and living it up as if the world would end tomorrow. He couldn't get the image out of his mind, as if they were calling to him...

"Jorry!"

He woke suddenly. Someone was calling him, whispering his name. Outside the house. Liara.

She had rejected him. What did she want now? He ignored her, angrily hoping that she would go away, but the whispering continued. It would be just his luck for his parents to hear her. Swallowing his annoyance, he ducked out of the house.

"Jorry. I had to see you."

He said nothing, trying to read her mood, wondering if she had forgiven him, and she mistook his silence for anger.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean...what I said." She opened her blue eyes wide. "Can you... Do you know what I'm thinking now?"

He shook his head.

"Well, it's all right if you do, because I'm only thinking how much I like you."

He didn't try to explain that what he sensed were not thoughts but feelings, and she was radiating unease.

"You want something."

"Oh, Jorry." She looked embarrassed but didn't deny it. Being known as a mind reader had some advantages.

"What is it?" he asked as gently as he could.

"One of the soldiers — he's horrid." Her revulsion and fear were genuine.

"He's been bothering you, and you're afraid."

"Will you help me?"

"Who is he, what's he been doing, and how do you want me to help?"

"I want you to come back to Quinly's Cat with me."

"For what? So he can tear me in pieces?"

"Do you think he would?"

Jorry took a deep breath. "How should I know? You've met him; I don't even know who he is."

Liara considered. "I don't think he would. I don't think he wants to cause real trouble, because that would make trouble for him, too."

"But bothering you is okay?"

"I don't think he really believes he's bothering me. I flirted with him at first, and he thinks..." She hid her face against Jorry's shoulder. Jorry could well imagine what the soldier thought; Liara looked mature for her age, and enjoyed the attention it brought her. However, with Liara in his arms like this, he was more inclined to anger at the man than sympathy.

If her showing up at the inn with a boyfriend could clear things up for her, it was a small enough thing for him to do. She might be using him, but doing something for her would clear his conscience. On the other hand, if the soldier was drunk, it could get ugly.

But, as he reminded himself, he was fairly good at slipping out of things. "Wait here," he said, "while I change."

He was back before Liara could finish her protests. He offered her his arm with a flourish that made her smile, and then whispered, "I'm rich tonight. Shall we go see what Quinly has cooking?"

She giggled and relaxed.

Quinly's Cat was noisy and full. The tables were crowded with Grondin's men, while many prominent townsmen, drinks in hand, were gathered around the empty fireplace, talking politics and looking important. They did their best to ignore the soldiers, although Jorry was sure that it was the soldiers' presence that had brought them there in the first place. But much as they wanted news of Grondin, they wouldn't humble themselves to ask it of common soldiers: better to wait for whatever old Quinly would pick up and pass on to them.

There were no women in sight except

for a couple of serving girls. And Liara.

Jorry cuddled Liara's face against his chest, his mouth close to her ear. "Which one?" he whispered.

She turned her face to his. "On the left, at the far table, with his back to us. Blond hair. Next to the green coat."

Jorry covered her mouth with a kiss before releasing her and gazing where she had indicated.

The blond man was hard to distinguish. The man in the green coat was big and seemed to be a local center of attention. The bench they were on was full, but opposite them, at the end, was room for at least one more. With squeezing, probably two. Taking Liara by the elbow, he approached the table.

"May we join you?" he asked. He smiled at the man nearest him, and, without waiting for a reply, seated Liara in the empty space and perched himself on the end. The silence was almost audible.

Jorry turned to the man in the green coat. "I hear you had a good hunt. Going to finish up tomorrow?" He smiled, trying to ignore the tingle of hostility he felt.

The blond man looked from Liara to Jorry and back. He was about Jorry's age and handsome, with a hard mouth.

Green coat grinned. "We'll get him, all right," he said. "We haven't failed yet."

Jorry glanced around at the men. "You've done this before?"

"Not them." He spat. "My pair. Kamala and Sudhir."

Jorry thought a moment. "The weasels."

"Not common weasels, they aren't. They could swallow a couple of your local weasels and still wonder what's for dinner."

"They must be huge."

"Three and a half feet from nose to tail tip, although" — he lowered his voice — "almost half of it's tail. But they're fierce. And quick.

"They don't attack directly, you know — not when they're after something bigger than themselves. They dart in and out of range, to wear it out. They're clever beasts."

The soldiers had relaxed; even the blond man's anger was less sharp. Jorry signaled one of the inn's girls to bring some stew and ale for Liara and himself.

Liara snuggled against him and looked flirtatiously around the room. She was safe, Jorry judged, for the rest of that day and the next, and by then the men would be gone.

"If the weasels are here to kill the basilisk," Jorry asked cautiously, "what are the men for?"

Artwork by Nicholas Jainschigg

"Keep my friends from wearing themselves out too early in the hunt. Also make Grondin look good."

"You don't sound too fond of him."

"Him! He's paying me, so I shouldn't complain, but this whole hunt was rigged. That basilisk was out in the wastelands — been there in his grandfather's day as well — but Grondin needs to show off. So he has us chase him. First, down into the valley, to frighten the villagers. And then, into the hills. But not near the castle — he was clear about that. Afraid of it himself."

"But what's it all for?"

Green coat dropped his voice. "Two things, really. One, there's been some unrest in the villages north of here, and this gives them something else to think about."

Jorry smiled. "And a reminder of what his soldiers look like, just in case. What's the second thing?"

"He's going courting. Wants to impress his prospective bride."

Jorry didn't answer. Liara was giving her attention to the soldier on the other side of her, a man old enough to be her father, whose enjoyment was tinged with wry amusement. Jorry stretched his senses to take in the rest of the room. The small bright spark of a quarrel flared at a far table, but for the most part the mood was placid. He almost didn't hear when green coat spoke to him.

"Want to join us tomorrow?"

The blond man had come fully alert and was staring at Jorry in cold challenge.

"I'd be glad to."

Other men were looking at him now, and so was Liara.

Jorry kept his gaze on the man in the green coat. "Do you have something for me to wear?"

"Don't be a fool," exclaimed the older man next to Liara, while the blond man across from them answered, "I'm sure I can find you something." Liara was frightened but said nothing.

"I'll see that he's properly set up," green coat said. "By the way, my name's Marnin."

"Thanks. I'm Jorry."

He tried to read the blond man, to know if he had just avoided a trap, but the emotions around him were too strong and jumbled.

They finished their meal without incident. Jorry settled their bill and stood up to leave, ignoring the men who were still talking, drinking, or beginning to doze where they sat.

Liara looked at him pleadingly. She was enjoying herself and didn't want to leave.

"I'll need to be alert in the morning," he said.

She stood, flashed a parting smile at the men around her, and took Jorry's arm.

It was colder outside. Jorry tried to put his arm around Liara, but she shrugged it off.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"You need to be alert in the morning."

He started to answer and caught himself. Liara was tired and happy and appreciated his rescue, but she still felt uneasy with him.

The weasels were every bit as large as Marnin had said.

Jorry stood outside the yard where they were being held. His clothes felt awkward, and viewing the world through goggles made him rely more than ever on his special sense, so that he wondered how the soldiers managed not to go stumbling around like a pack of fools. And that, he reflected, was probably the secret of it: that they'd try anything to avoid looking foolish.

Marnin was in the yard with the weasels, harnessing them and talking to them affectionately. They returned his affection, but Jorry also felt their restlessness.

"Can I help you?" he asked.

The other man didn't answer immediately, but one of the weasels turned toward Jorry and showed its teeth. He quieted it with thoughts of affection and fellowship.

"See you're not afraid of them. Most

Artwork by Nicholas Jainschigg

folk are terrified, hide it as they may."

"They're tame enough with you."

"Known me all their lives. Just infants when I got them, and puny at that. Hardly thought they'd survive.

"I'm about done here. Ready to go?"

"Whenever you say."

Jorry stood quietly aside, next to the weasel handler, as their captain got the troop organized. Jorry felt the hostility of the blond soldier from the inn, but the hoods and masks kept him from recognizing anyone. The men were afraid of the weasels, as Marnin had said, and kept their distance. The captain spoke to Marnin once about picking up rabble from the inn, but he didn't press the issue.

Few of the townsfolk were in sight. There was none of the joking of the night before. If Liara was awake, she had prudently stayed away.

They finally got moving. Leaving their horses at the inn, the soldiers strode ahead, carrying spears and large copper-covered shields that were polished like mirrors. Jorry, Marnin, and the weasels followed in the rear. The weasels strained at their leashes, almost nipping at the heels of the last soldiers, who hurried to keep up with their fellows.

"Can I hold one?" Jorry asked.

Marnin turned his head to regard him. His emotions were unreadable, making Jorry wished he hadn't asked. Suddenly he laughed and handed him Sudhir's leash.

Jorry gave his attention to the giant weasel. The animal was an interesting study in enthusiasm, hungry and eager for prey, but interested, also, in all the smells of the trail for their own sake. He enjoyed Marnin's company as well as Kamala's, and seemed to accept Jorry. The soldiers were of no interest and stank up the trail, but he was used to men and tolerated them.

The path wound on and on, seeming much longer than the day before when Jorry climbed it alone. The soldiers, who had been quiet at first, began to talk. Neither Jorry nor the weasels sensed the basilisk.

After what felt like several hours of hiking, the men stopped moving ahead and begin milling around. Jorry still sensed nothing, but Marnin took Sudhir's leash and started forward, and Jorry trotted alongside. The soldiers moved aside out of their way.

Now Marnin and the weasels led, and the soldiers followed. Sudhir and Kamala were pleased to have an empty trail ahead, uncontaminated by man scent. Jorry, too, felt freer with the other men behind him.

Suddenly Kamala began tugging on her leash, and then Sudhir joined in.

"Take it easy," Marnin said, holding them back. "We're not there yet." But there was pleasure in his voice.

Jorry looked back at the troop of soldiers strung out behind. He felt their tiredness and unease, with small sparks of irritation and anger, and then, suddenly, a strong stab of dislike.

He turned back to Marnin and the weasels, relaxing in the warmth of their relationship, and reached out for Sudhir's mind. There! He could smell the basilisk!

Jorry extended his own senses, but the prey was still too far off. He refocused on Sudhir, who was filled, whiskers to tail, with the excitement of the chase.

"Easy there," called Marnin.

Jorry felt his muzzle quiver. Only the leash, and his bond with Marnin, kept him from dashing off madly after his prey. Then a rock underfoot almost tripped him, and Jorry was thrown back suddenly into his own mind.

He remembered the basilisk as he had seen it the day before, when he had wanted to save it at all costs, dangerous and alien as it was. And now he was ready to tear it to pieces!

He shook his head, to rid it of the conflicting images.

"Are you all right?" Marnin asked.

"I'm fine."

"It's nothing yet," called a voice from behind. "Wait till we find the slimy creature, and it turns its gaze on you."

Jorry didn't have to turn his head to recognize the blond man's voice; it matched his mind perfectly. Jorry tried to frame a sarcastic reply, thought better of it, and turned his mind back to the hunt.

He felt the basilisk now, at the very edge of his senses, fiery, caustic, and alien. He sharpened his focus.

The basilisk heard — felt? — them coming and hissed in anger. The weasels bounded forward, both soothed and encouraged by their link with Marnin.

The basilisk's anger felt like fire, flaring out from a hard center core that was hardly animate and totally inhuman. Anger. Pain. Sorrow. But again, no hatred.

Alien, Jorry thought. He should have been left out in the wastelands. But instead he was here, where he didn't belong, and they'd kill him for that.

"Well, boy? Running home yet, or you plan to get killed?"

Jorry stiffened. Alien he might be, but if he was marked for death, that was none of the blond fool's business.

"Steady now."

Jorry calmed himself and relinked loosely with Sudhir.

They were almost there now, he and Kamala. Ahead was their great prey, snake and more-than-snake, and he was all but giddy from its smell.

The path wound upward, but the basilisk smell was off to one side, and lower than the path. He tugged on his leash. Marnin spoke again, soothingly, and held them still while unfastening Kamala's leash. Jorry withdrew slightly to watch Marnin's efficient gloved hands. He saw Kamala come free and dash off, and felt himself tug with impatience. Then Sudhir was free also, and Jorry stood with Marnin, watching them both.

The weasels flowed along the ground, under bushes, around rocks. On the edge of vision, Kamala made a sudden change of direction, as if bouncing off a rock. The rock moved, became the basilisk's thrashing tail.

If the basilisk was shy of men, it was not shy of weasels. It turned, much faster than Jorry would have expected, and launched its head, snakelike, in the direction of Kamala, who danced out of the way as Sudhir struck its flank. The basilisk fanned its wings and hissed.

Kamala advanced, teasingly, almost within the basilisk's reach. It turned its head to stare sideways at her, giving Sudhir time to attack again. But barely. The basilisk swung its head sideways, its jaws snapping shut just inches from Sudhir's tail.

Jorry no longer knew which side he was on, but felt like cheering for both: the weasels for their grace and daring, the basilisk for its sheer persistence. It seemed almost like some kind of ritual combat, fittingly accompanied by the distant sound of a horn.

Now Sudhir teased while Kamala struck. The basilisk hissed and spat, and the leaves of the bushes turned brown in a path in front of its head. The horn sounded again.

"If you like the weasels so much, why don't you go down and give them a hand? Impress Lord Grondin while you're at it."

Jorry ignored him, but he saw Marnin step back and turn. He started to say, "Don't bother." But Marnin wasn't looking at the blond soldier; he was gazing toward the hills where a small party of

riders was visible. Marnin pushed aside his goggles for a better view, stared silently for a moment, and put the goggles back in place. "I could swear that's Grondin," he muttered. His mind felt uncertain.

"I thought he was afraid...?"

"He is. I would say he had forgotten which way he sent us, but his orders were very exact. Also, there seems to be a lady with him."

The captain dashed up to them as the horn sounded a third time, now unmistakably from the direction of the hills.

"Hold them off," he ordered Marnin, "while I go find out what his lordship wants."

"Kamala!" Marnin called softly but with authority. "Sudhir! To me!"

Kamala, who was getting ready to attack, hesitated long enough for the basilisk to notice her and rake at her with one taloned foot. She lay still. Jorry could feel her, conscious but stunned.

Sudhir dashed in close, ran off, and dashed in close again without attacking, leading the basilisk away from his mate.

"Kamala!"

She stirred and the pain in her side intensified.

"Here, girl. Beautiful one, brave one..."

She crawled slowly toward Marnin, away from the basilisk and Sudhir.

"Bastards!" Marnin muttered. It wasn't clear whether he meant basilisks, the soldiers, or lords like Grondin.

They seemed to stand there forever, Jorry helpless, Marnin calling encouragement, as the wounded weasel crawled up the slope to lie, finally, at Marnin's feet. Marnin knelt to examine her. The soldiers muttered restlessly and walked back and forth.

"The Lady Oranza desires to watch."

Jorry turned to stare, as best he could, at the captain. Marnin soothed Kamala, giving no acknowledgement of the man's presence.

Lord Grondin and Lady Oranza had dismounted and were approaching on foot, Oranza trying to ignore Grondin's protective hand on her elbow. They were both well covered and masked. Now that Jorry had turned away from his friends and the basilisk, the captain's urgency, Oranza's pride, and Grondin's mingled fear and possessiveness all fought for his attention.

Marnin waited until Grondin had come up behind the captain, and then turned his head to address him without getting up.

"I'm afraid there's nothing to watch. The weasel is injured."

"I thought," said Lady Oranza, "that the weasels were used only for tracking, and for cornering the beast. Certainly there are enough soldiers here to make an end of it."

"And lose a few lives in the process."

The blond man pushed forward, and put his hand on Jorry's shoulder. "We're not afraid, are we?"

"If you're not afraid," said Marnin, "you're a fool."

"What about our hero here? Ready to protect his girl, and chummy as you please with the weasels."

Jorry didn't answer. He looked back down the empty-looking slope and reached out mentally to Sudhir.

There he was, still fierce and alert, but beginning to tire. Jorry waited until he was resting between charges and called him silently to come join Kamala.

"...must be turned to stone already." A hand waved in front of Jorry's face. He turned angrily, trying to think of a reply, and heard Marnin's "Let him be."

Ignoring them then, he called again to Sudhir.

A shove almost knocked him off his feet. "Well, at least some of us ain't cowards. Who's coming with me?"

No one answered.

"All right," he snarled, "I'll go by myself."

"You're a fool," Marnin repeated, and then, in a different voice, "It's all right, boy. She's going to be all right."

As the blond soldier crashed down the slope, Jorry looked to see Sudhir with Kamala at Marnin's feet. He smiled.

"Surely he's not the only man here with courage," said Lady Oranza. "A golden crown to any man who puts his spear in the beast, and five to the man who kills it."

Two more men came forward, but with less enthusiasm, and followed in the blond man's path.

Jorry cast his mind forward to meet the basilisk's, and nearly staggered where he stood. In response to the weasels, the beast had roused to kill, only to be frustrated repeatedly. It sought some prey now, any prey, edible or not. It heard something approaching and turned its head sideways to attack.

The man carried a spear, leveled at the basilisk, and a shiny shield held somewhat askew. Nothing of his actual body was visible to the basilisk's gaze.

The spear ended in an unpleasantly sharp point. The basilisk sidestepped and swung its tail, hitting the man's legs and knocking him to the ground. He was up quickly, with the spear again between his body and the basilisk, but he waited now, studying the situation before attacking again. Two more men appeared behind him.

The basilisk advanced, hissing. The men spread out, threatening to attack from either side.

The basilisk moved suddenly, thrashing the man on its left with its tail and then lunging toward the man on its right,

Artwork by Nicholas Jainschigg

who moved too slowly, groggily bringing up his shield arm in an attempt to fend off the stinking mouth that snaked past and clamped onto his shoulder.

Momentarily ignored, the man in the middle struck with his spear, catching the basilisk in its side. The basilisk hissed and released the first man's shoulder.

"Your mirrors! Use your mirrors!" came the shouts in Jorry's ears. Enmeshed in the basilisk's mind, he barely understood what he heard; the men fighting the basilisk seemed not to hear the shouts at all.

The basilisk twisted, and the spear, still lodged in its side, was wrenched from its attacker's hand. Hissing with pain, the basilisk advanced while the man scrambled up the slope. He stumbled, and the basilisk fastened a talon around his lower leg. The man screamed.

The basilisk's side flared again with pain as another spear joined the first. The basilisk reared back, releasing its foot from the man's leg. The second attacker, however, had been learning and pulled back quickly.

The basilisk swung its head, regarding the scene. The man on the right, with the injured shoulder, had retreated well beyond striking distance. The man in the middle crawled a distance away, using his hands and good foot, and sat still, clutching his injured leg. Oblivious to danger, he pulled up his trouser leg to get a better look at the wound. The basilisk also looked...

Jorry felt sick. The men around him were mostly still unaware of what had happened; Lady Oranza asked, "Why doesn't he move?" in a tone that held both concern and contempt.

"He's dead," answered Marnin.

Lord Grondin said nothing, but Jorry could feel the effort it took him to maintain his self-control.

The two remaining soldiers could be seen now to be returning, the injured man going first while the other covered his retreat.

"So much for your brave soldiers," said Lady Oranza. "But why didn't they use the mirrors?"

"They panicked," Marnin growled. "They were unprepared, sent against something they didn't understand..."

"I think we should be leaving," said Grondin, offering Oranza his arm. "My dear?"

She shrugged disdainfully. "I suppose you were right after all. We should not have come."

There was silence while they left.

"Now what?" asked the captain. "I've lost one of my men, and the basilisk's there the same as ever."

"Hardly the same," said Marnin. "It was Grondin had us chase it there. But take care of your men; I'll worry about the basilisk."

The captain got his men into some sort of order and led them away toward the village.

"Well now," said Marnin, "it looks as if I'll be settling down in your village for a while. I've got Kamala bandaged, and there's nothing broken, but she won't be going hunting for some time. In fact, I'm going to make her a litter, and I'd appreciate your help carrying her to the village."

"Of course I'll help. But, Marnin, about the basilisk — do you still have to kill it?"

"Those were my orders, and I've never failed yet."

"But things have changed. For one thing, Grondin's soldiers are gone. And then, the Lady Oranza is not likely to be impressed, whatever you do."

"What do you suggest then? Leave it alone and let people stumble into it until it gets accustomed to manflesh?"

"Can't you chase it back where it came from?"

"Just me and my friends? You get the soldiers on its tail again and it might run or it might not, but set the weasels on it and it'll fight, long as it can."

Jorry thought about it. "If someone could lure it back to the wilderness, would you let it go?"

"And how might that someone lure it back?"

"If he could just — I don't know — make it remember what it was like there, hot and dry, without a lot of people around to bother it..."

"If someone could do that, we just might let it go. Are you the someone?"

"Maybe."

"Tell me," said Marnin thoughtfully, "when I was too busy tending Kamala to call Sudhir, and he came back anyway — did you call him?"

Jorry nodded, afraid to use his voice.

"All right, then. I might agree, assuming you can do what you say. I saw the basilisk take a couple of spear hits. Would you happen to know how badly it was hurt?"

"I can check." He reached with his mind, cautiously, and made contact.

Because he had been thinking about it, he felt the pain first. It was bad but not intolerable. The basilisk was tolerating it quite well, absorbed as it was in the remains of the blond soldier.

"Take it easy," said Marnin, as soothingly as he spoke to his weasels, and Jorry felt the big man's arm around his shoulders as he pulled back into himself.

"It's hurt, but not too badly, I think," Jorry said.

Marnin nodded, his masked face giving away nothing. Jorry probed, looking for fear or revulsion and finding neither.

"You're not afraid of me," he said.

"Should I be?"

"I thought — I'm abnormal, I'm..." *What had he thought, exactly?*

"You're human for sure," said Marnin, "although my pair ain't, and their teeth are a lot sharper than yours. And we're still friends."

Jorry thought wistfully of Liara and her fear of him. But she was quite young; she didn't have Marnin's experience of the world. Nor had she been on a basilisk hunt.

But she could learn. Besides, she hadn't rejected him entirely.

He smiled at Marnin.

❧

Lucy Cohen Schmeidler was born and still lives in New York City. She is a computer software developer and is married, with three children. She made her first sale (to *The Leading Edge*) two years ago, at the age of 49.

Nicholas Jainschigg lives in New York City with his wife Monica and a grey-cheeked parakeet. He recently won the Jack Gaughan Memorial Award for Best Emerging Artist. ("What I'm emerging from is not mentioned," he notes.) Rumor has it that he uses his relatives as his models, but we didn't ask about the basilisk.

FANTASY WORLDS FESTIVAL

April 22-24, 1994

Berkeley Marina Mariott

GOHs: Mercedes Lackey & Larry Dixon

For information, send stamped, addressed envelope to Fantasy Worlds Festival c/o Marion Zimmer Bradley, P.O. Box 72, Berkeley, CA 94701.

The Works of Marion Zimmer Bradley

Darkover Novels

MZB insists that the Darkover novels are not a series and can be read in any order, since none of the books assumes that you are familiar with any other of the books. If you simply MUST have an order in which to read them, it is better to read them chronologically by publication date, rather than in chronology of Darkovan history; that way you will follow MZB's thought processes as her concept of Darkover grew and expanded. (Also, her later books are generally better written than her earlier ones.)

in order of publication	**Darkovan chronology**
PLANET SAVERS, Ace 1962	DARKOVER LANDFALL
SWORD OF ALDONES, Ace 1962	STORMQUEEN
THE BLOODY SUN, Ace 1964	HAWKMISTRESS
STAR OF DANGER, Ace 1965	TWO TO CONQUER
WINDS OF DARKOVER, Ace 1970	HEIRS OF HAMMERFELL
WORLD WRECKERS, Ace 1971	*REDISCOVERY
DARKOVER LANDFALL, DAW 1972	SHATTERED CHAIN (1)
THE SPELL SWORD, DAW 1974	SPELL SWORD
HERITAGE OF HASTUR, DAW 75	FORBIDDEN TOWER
SHATTERED CHAIN, DAW 1976	SHATTERED CHAIN (2, 3)
FORBIDDEN TOWER, DAW 1977	THENDARA HOUSE
STORMQUEEN, DAW 1978	CITY OF SORCERY
BLOODY SUN (rewrite) Ace 79	STAR OF DANGER
TWO TO CONQUER, DAW 1980	WINDS OF DARKOVER
SHARRA'S EXILE, DAW 1981	THE BLOODY SUN
HAWKMISTRESS, DAW 1982	HERITAGE OF HASTUR
THENDARA HOUSE, DAW 1983	PLANET SAVERS
CITY OF SORCERY, DAW 1984	SHARRA'S EXILE
HEIRS OF HAMMERFELL, DAW 1989	WORLD WRECKERS
REDISCOVERY, DAW Apr 1993	*RETURN TO DARKOVER
*RETURN TO DARKOVER, DAW ?	

Mini-series or direct sequels to one another are:

SPELL SWORD/FORBIDDEN TOWER/BLOODY SUN (rewrite)
SHATTERED CHAIN/THENDARA HOUSE/CITY OF SORCERY
HERITAGE OF HASTUR/SHARRA'S EXILE/RETURN TO DARKOVER

SHARRA'S EXILE retells the events of SWORD OF ALDONES

Darkover Anthologies

THE KEEPER'S PRICE, DAW 80
SWORD OF CHAOS, DAW 1982
FREE AMAZONS OF DARKOVER, DAW 1985
OTHER SIDE OF THE MIRROR, DAW 1987
RED SUN OF DARKOVER, DAW 1987
FOUR MOONS OF DARKOVER, DAW 1988
DOMAINS OF DARKOVER, DAW 1990
RENUNCIATES OF DARKOVER, DAW 1991
LERONI OF DARKOVER, DAW, Nov 1991
*TOWERS OF DARKOVER, DAW Jul 1993
* MZB's DARKOVER, DAW Oct 1993
* SNOWS OF DARKOVER, DAW ?

Non Darkover Science Fiction

THE DOOR THROUGH SPACE, Ace, 1961
SEVEN FROM THE STARS, Ace, 1962
FALCONS OF NARABEDLA, Ace, 1964
THE BRASS DRAGON, Ace 1970,
COLORS OF SPACE, Pocket 1983
THE ENDLESS VOYAGE, Ace 1975
THE ENDLESS UNIVERSE, Ace 1979
HUNTERS OF THE RED MOON, DAW 1973
THE SURVIVORS, DAW 1979 (sequel to HUNTERS)
THE RUINS OF ISIS, Pocket 1980
SURVEY SHIP, Ace 1980
WARRIOR WOMAN, DAW 1985

Fantasy/Occult

BLACK TRILLIUM (with Andre Norton & Julian May), 1990, 1991
DARK SATANIC, Tor 1988
DRUMS OF DARKNESS, Ballantine, 1976
HOUSE BETWEEN THE WORLDS, Del Rey 1981
THE INHERITOR, Tor, 1984
NIGHT'S DAUGHTER, Ballantine, 1985
FALL OF ATLANTIS, Pocket, 1987 (WEB OF LIGHT/WEB OF DARKNESS - written in the early 1950's)
WITCH HILL, Tor, 1990

Anthologies

THE BEST OF MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY, DAW, 1988
THE DARK INTRUDER AND OTHER STORIES, Ace, 1964
GREYHAVEN: A FANTASY ANTHOLOGY, DAW, 1983
LYTHANDE, DAW, 1986
SWORD AND SORCERESS, DAW, 1984
SWORD AND SORCERESS, vol. 2, DAW, 1985
SWORD AND SORCERESS, vol. 3, DAW, 1986
SWORD AND SORCERESS, vol. 4, DAW, 1987
SWORD AND SORCERESS, vol. 5, DAW, 1988
SPELLS OF WONDER, DAW, Sep 1989
SWORD AND SORCERESS, vol. 6, DAW, 1990
SWORD AND SORCERESS, vol. 7, DAW, 1990
SWORD AND SORCERESS, vol. 8, DAW, 1991
SWORD AND SORCERESS, vol. 9, DAW, 1992
*SWORD AND SORCERESS, vol. 10, DAW, Jun 1993

Mainstream

THE CATCH TRAP, Ballantine, 1979 (hc), 1980, 1984 (pb)
THE MISTS OF AVALON, Knopf, 1983 (hc) Ballantine, 1984
THE FIREBRAND, Simon & Schuster, 1987, Pocket, 1988
*THE FOREST HOUSE, Viking, 1994

* not yet in print -- Titles of books not yet in print are subject to change, as are publication dates.

Redemption

by Sean Erik Ponce

The pain was too great for Ben to manage. If this is what the rest of his life would be like, he thought, then he'd made the right decision. He stood before the forest, the hated forest: the stretch of woods that had taken the life of his daughter. Tomorrow, it would be one year to the day.

"Happy anniversary, Melissa," he muttered bitterly, as he readjusted his backpack and shuffled forward, intending never to return.

He stepped onto the dead leaves of autumn, his boots crushing them, grinding them into the ground. He sniffed, and in the air was a sweet fragrance from which he derived no pleasure.

He pondered the past year of his life.

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

His daughter had died. Unable to distance himself from the tragedy, he caused the ensuing break-up of his marriage. When Melissa had perished, he couldn't handle the tears of his wife, Nicole, the support of his friends, or the bitterness he'd felt at the forest for robbing him of the joy of his life.

As a result, his friends shunned him. Indifference caused him to lose his job, then his wife. From that point on he descended into hell. He spent every cent of his unemployment checks for liquor and lived in squalor. When his wife filed for divorce, he rejoiced, for the sale of their house would keep him in booze for a long time to come.

But it wasn't enough. No matter how much whiskey he consumed during the day, his nights were filled with dreams of his daughter, with her screams, his inability to save her, and his rage at nature for taking her life. Every night he awoke, shaking in impotence, a cry upon his lips, sweat pouring from his brow to mingle with salty tears of sorrow.

He lost fifty pounds. What few meals he ate he shared with the roaches that dominated the kitchen of his shabby rental. He watched no television, listened to no radio, answered no mail. He drank, and existed only in his own mind, replaying the tragedy again and again, until he realized almost one year had passed.

One morning, unable to cope, Ben made a decision. He stumbled into his bedroom and searched for a particular suitcase, one he'd kept locked since the sale of his house. He fumbled with the latches, cursed his trembling fingers, and swung the suitcase open. Reaching inside, he clasped cool metal. He drew the Ruger from its holster, staring at his last friend, the only friend he had that would accede without complaint to his request. He withdrew a clip and inserted it halfway...then he shook his head and pulled it out completely. The timing wasn't right. He thought of where his daughter had died, the beauty of the forest, the sweet sounds of the brook, the sharp scent of pine as the sun rose majestically in the clear sky, and knew he had a journey to make. One last trip before it all ended.

He set up camp at the exact location of the previous year. This time, there was only one sleeping bag in place of the two that had rested side by side the year before. Ben got a fire going and started the coffee. There was no further need of liquor, no reason to cloud his mind. He wasn't here to forget, he was here to remember the last few moments of the time they had together.

The hours passed in introspective silence. Ben blocked out the sights and sounds of the forest, the same sights and sounds that used to enthrall Melissa. He remembered sitting by the fire with her, his huge arms engulfing her small form. He would explain each and every sound to her, allaying her fears of the forest, until they reversed the game and she cradled him, explaining the chirps, the hoots, and the wailing of the wind to Ben as he feigned dismay. He remembered...

Finally Ben fell into a peaceful sleep that lasted until just before dawn.

He awoke, his eyes stinging and his lungs burning. He rolled over, squinting through the haze...but it wasn't haze that drifted before him, it was pungent smoke from a fire! Ben glanced at his campfire. No, that wasn't the cause of the bitter smoke. He could hear the licking of the flames surrounding him. Should he stay? One way of dying was as good as the next. But he would not allow himself to perish in that manner.

Ben untangled himself from his bag and leapt to his feet. Thrusting his boots on, he started to run, stopped, and returned to remove the Ruger from his backpack. The fire changed nothing. It merely accelerated his timetable by a few hours. He raced down a corridor of trees, the pathway he and Melissa had followed that fateful day.

He slipped off his down jacket, tossed it aside, the heat assaulting him from three sides. He headed for the brook, ignoring the rush of the smaller forest animals as they too fled from the deadly conflagration.

He paused at the brook, feeling the tremendous heat from the fire on his back. He swore he could hear the whisper of trickling water over the crackling roar of the blaze. He stared at the right bank of the brook There a pine tree, decayed from the inside, had collapsed on little Melissa, instantly taking her life. His vision blurred and he squeezed his eyes shut, picturing the disaster one last time, seeing the lifeblood of his little girl draining into the greedy earth.

Ben opened his eyes and stared at the stump of the fatal tree. Through the smoke and tears, he could almost imagine the slight form of Melissa lying near it. Wait, someone *was* there!

Melissa!

Even as he whispered her name and stepped forward, he knew it couldn't be her. It was a girl. In the hazy clearing she resembled no girl he'd ever seen. He slowed as he approached her, the fire temporarily forgotten. He first noticed her color: chartreuse-tinted skin that so blended with the forest it was hard to focus on her. Her eyes were amber. Pale-green strands hung damply across her forehead. She was naked, her budding breasts pressed against her arms as she hugged herself.

Her eyes, like those of a trapped animal, continually flickered between Ben and the fire. As she tried to slide away from Ben, she made a small sound that spoke of pain and fear. She grimaced, glancing down. Her leg was twisted at an impossible angle, brownish fluid slowly dripping from an open wound.

"Who...what are you?" Ben couldn't help taking a step forward. The girl moaned in dread.

"Let me help you," he said. She cringed at his feet, tears flowing from her haunted eyes, so alone and in pain. Ben's heart melted. Slowly, he reached a hand toward her.

"You've got to let me help you." He waved his other arm in a circle and simply said, "The fire!"

Ben knew she understood. He sensed her hopelessness as she considered her choices: him or the fire.

In the end there was no choice. Her fear of the flames overcame all other emotions. Tentatively, so as not to alarm her, he slowly slid his hand down her arm and grasped her hand. He almost let go in surprise at the coarse texture of her skin. A high-pitched wail escaped her lips as he lifted her, the one leg jutting awkwardly.

Ben winced when she cried out. He stepped into the brook as gently as he could, knowing every movement brought pain to this wondrous creature.

Dryad!

Unbidden, the word came to him. He remembered reading a fairy tale to Melissa years ago, one involving a mythical creature of wood which existed in isolated forests. But they were fairies, spirits, creatures of fable; surely they couldn't exist? Yet in his arms he carried a girl not human, who defied explanation.

She lay her head against his chest and he could feel the fever in her. Delirious, she spoke to him in a singsong voice that was melodious despite her anguish. She lapsed into near unconsciousness, and her arms tightened around his neck. As Ben waded through the brook, away from the fire, he held her closer, unaware he was stroking her hair, mumbling to him-

self: "It's okay, Melissa. Daddy's saved you this time, honey. I'll never let you go."

And he cried, great, bitter tears he should have shed long ago. His lament for Melissa began to fade, just a little, as he realized it wasn't too late for this little girl to live. He caressed her, wondering how he could have ever thought her skin was rough to the touch; so soft she was, and he never wanted to let her go.

The fire was far behind them. He stepped from the water and felt clean, free of guilt and anger for the first time since the accident. He felt redeemed, baptized, ready to begin anew, to draw together the shattered remains of his life.

A sound reached his ears, a trill of questioning. He peered into the foliage, seeing nothing. In his arms the dryad stirred. She raised her head, her eyes no longer showing fear, and spoke in response to the sounds they had just heard. There was a reply. She stared at a certain spot, and Ben followed her eyes. By straining he could just see two small forms at the fringe of a small copse. The girl turned back to Ben, her hand weakly gesturing to a clearing ahead.

He understood, and felt a tearing inside of him at the thought of losing her so soon. He carried her forward and gently placed her on the ground. Before he released her she reached out and brushed his cheek with a feathery touch.

As he backed away she glanced at him once more, and the look of trust in her eyes would stay with him forever.

When he was a distance from her, two forms darted from the forest and gathered her in their arms. They rushed into the woods.

Ben smiled and turned to walk away. He paused, reached inside his pocket, and took out the Ruger. He tossed it into the creek. It would no longer be necessary.

❧

SEAN ERIK PONCE has been writing for less than three years, and has had three dozen acceptances so far. His hobbies include long-distance running and bicycling and chess. In 1992, he was one of three finalists for SPWAO's Best New Writer category.

MARGARET ORGAN-KEAN is another of our favorite regular artists. She studied art and art history at Boston University and the University of Washington, and currently does computer support for a living.

Letters

MOVED...NO FORWARDING

I. Rate Fan, Newtown, CA

I subscribed to your magazine a year ago and have only received one copy. You have some nerve to send me a renewal notice. Send me the missing three issues and I'll consider renewing. By the way, please note my new address — I moved about ten months ago.

In the past couple of months, we've received about a dozen letters of this sort, so I thought it might be advisable to explain some of the mysteries of the Post Office. We mail the magazine third class bulk rate (except for overseas subscribers, and they pay extra to insure they will receive it sometime this century). This enables us to keep mailing costs down. We also don't pay the Post Office to return undeliverable copies to us — it's simply too expensive. Now, third class mail is not normally forwarded. You can request to have all third class mail forwarded when you put in a change of address (if you guarantee to pay the forwarding charges), but then you may find yourself paying to have old junk mail follow you around. And it'll only work for a year. By far the simplest solution to this dilemma is to SEND US A CHANGE OF ADDRESS CARD WHEN YOU MOVE. While we are quite willing to give people the benefit of the doubt when a random issue gets eaten in the mails, it really isn't fair for subscribers to expect us to subsidize their absentmindedness. — HRJ

STRANGER THAN FICTION?

Margaret Hehman-Smith, Hollydale, CA

I'd like to reply to your rejection letter regarding "Hole in the Canvas", my story of an artist who makes slits in the canvases she paints on enabling her to see through and eventually she does see the other side. Your letter states, "I found the events in this story so preposterous that I could not believe in them, or even suspend my disbelief long enough to believe in them for the duration of the story." I have a Masters Degree in Fine Art and have been slitting my canvases for years. People recognize my work because of it. Once, I was working so hard on a deadline, I dreamed I went through the canvas. This is how the story evolved. Now here is a real-life artist who actually works in this fashion, and you can't believe it. Is truth stranger than fiction?

It's not enough for a thing to be true, it must sound true. I once received an "impossible" rejection for a confession which I took from a medical text book. — MZB

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF OUR INTREPID STORYTELLER

Kate Bledsoe, Jefferson, GA

As a result of the letters that were printed in the magazine, I have received a number of requests for information on storytelling. (No gigs, just questions.) Since I don't do workshops (yet), I have put together a "goof-proof" sheet that I send out on request. I have also enclosed a box of goodies for the staff to enjoy at coffee break as a thank you.

1. Know the story cold. Getting lost isn't the worst thing that can happen, umming and erring has it beat.

2. Be able to improvise. This sounds like a contradiction of #1, but it isn't. ANYONE can get distracted, your time can be cut, or the roof can fall in. If an undesirable act of God occurs, roll with the punch.

3. Avoid cliches, sugariness, and other triteness unless you're trying to be absurd. Sappiness turns off audiences.

4. Move around a bit while you talk, and make eye contact with individuals. That will prevent fanny fatigue on your part and maintain interest on the audience's part.

5. Try a costume. I find that it minimizes stage fright. Some people merely feel ridiculous, so if you fall into that category, wear what you're most comfortable in. Whatever you choose to wear, be sure that it is something that you can move in, sweat in, and that you won't be heartbroken if a Lilliputian spills grape kool-aid on it. Parents object if you feed their offspring to the tigers at the zoo.

We agree: don't feed the children to the tigers. But you can feed brownies to the staff again anytime you like. — HRJ

"OWLS" FAN CLUB

Mary Ellen Bradley, Manchester NH

I just received Issue #19. Wow — Janny Wurts' cover is magnificent! You've had some fantastic covers, but I think this is the best yet. I must have sat for ten minutes (at least) with the covers open delighting in this painting.

I'm very pleased that you liked the cover, and feel that we were fortunate to be able to purchase publications rights. — REH

The Two Princesses

Feona Manning

On that third day in September, the Magic Council convened to discover a most unusual fact: in all its centuries of magical decisions, spiritual discussions, and even one or two curses, a thing like this had never occurred before.

Judge Kober, a learned and wise warlock, had been selected for this most unusual case. Two young women both claimed to be the princess Taja. But only one could be.

Her father had cloistered her from the world in a nunnery, from her birth until the day she was eighteen. But now two extraordinarily beautiful young women had arrived at the palace in separate coaches, each claiming to be his daughter.

The subject had created much discussion and debate. The poor king had taken both girls in until the matter could be settled in court, but was anxious to welcome the heir to his magic lore officially.

For years the king had waited while the Good Witches of Pryor trained his beloved child. He knew she would emerge good and kind, and powerful in the skills of his ancestors.

Artwork by Stan Bruns

Never could he have predicted a thing like this.

Of the three judges the Royal Council considered to preside over this case like, Judge Kober was deemed the most likely to discover the charlatan and order her removal from the province.

It was a weighty matter and one upon which the Judge — a man guessed to be the oldest man in the kingdom of Kiani Atki — had pondered for days. He had dealt with many matters of enchantment, and earlier in the year had won wide respect for his fair hearings in the case of the bewitched fairy from the castle of Omerr.

Still, as the royal subjects of Kiani Atki convened in the great marble court of the House of Kings, each reflected on the possible disasters of the wrong pronouncement.

The impostor was clearly a woman of great powers, stronger than any other witch in the kingdom. No enchantments, spells or talismans had been able to reveal a disguise. And when the two young women were initially interviewed by the king, no discrepancies in their testimony could be discerned.

My father, the king's counsel, asked me to be present at court. Nothing could have kept me away. I was as curious about the outcome as any, because I had trained with the princess and yet I could not tell them apart.

As the six members of the jury assembled in the Seats of Judgment, I silently applauded my father's fair selection.

There was Milo, the alchemist from our city; Hana, the candlemaker; Albert, the wheelmaker; Elia and Maris, two seers from the twin cities of Penaro and Tanero, who had servedon many juries. Then there was Oros, the shaman from the East, who had predicted and averted many catastrophes in our kingdom.

Judge Kober was anxious to begin the judicial process and restore the true heir to the kingdom to her rightful place. He wasted no time with preliminaries. After consulting the royal oracle, he took his famed jeweled wand from its carrying case, held it for a moment, then placed it on the desk before him.

I had never before seen an item so beautiful. My father, long an admirer of Judge Kober, had told me of the wand's versatile uses. Once he'd even seen the judge turn it into a snake.

The two young women had been sequestered in separate witches' cottages these past three days by the Judge's orders and were to stand trial separately. Later, they would be brought together, when the judge and jury would examine their responses in each other's presence.

The first Taja entered. She looked pale and fragile in a dusky crimson gown which kissed the floor as she walked. Her long raven hair did not respond to the sun's enhancing light streaming through the open windows of the court, but the sun had worked its magic on the girl herself. She raised her face up to it for a moment. She paused on her path to the witness seat, closed her eyes, basked in the warm glow on her face.

A cry choked my throat. How well I understood her! For years we were deprived of sun and laughter, blue sky and tears, as we learned the ancient art of herb magic.

Like my mother, I would one day be responsible for taking care of my province. In fact, it was my mother's dedication to our people which kept her from this hearing. She had in her care a small, gravely ill child who could not be left unattended.

Taja took her seat, then turned and smiled disarmingly at me. This surprised me, and my father, too. He glanced quickly for my reaction. Words had never been our strongest suit, my father and me. We were able to talk without them. I sent a silent message to my father telling him I was sure it was Taja.

Softly, but firmly, Taja answered my father's questions of her birth and her mother's death soon after. There were tears in her eyes, as there always were when she talked of it. She was a convincing witness.

Love poured out of my heart for Taja. She had been my best friend since childhood, my confidante and my strongest supporter in every way.

The judge and jury were silent during her testimony. Only Oros, the shaman, was busily making notes.

There was some talk among the jurors as the second girl appeared. A murmur went through the room.

She was dressed exactly the same.

She made the same way down the aisle, stopped to let the sun play on her face, and turned and smiled at me when she took her seat.

My father looked at me. I stared back at him in bewilderment.

The second Taja, too, proved a formidable witness. When the judge declined a recess, was it my imagination or did a flicker of disappointment register on the second girl's face?

The first girl was called to join the second witness. Animosity bristled between them as the jury studied them together.

Finally the judge looked at the papers before him. "I have my own questions," he said. "If counsel has finished?"

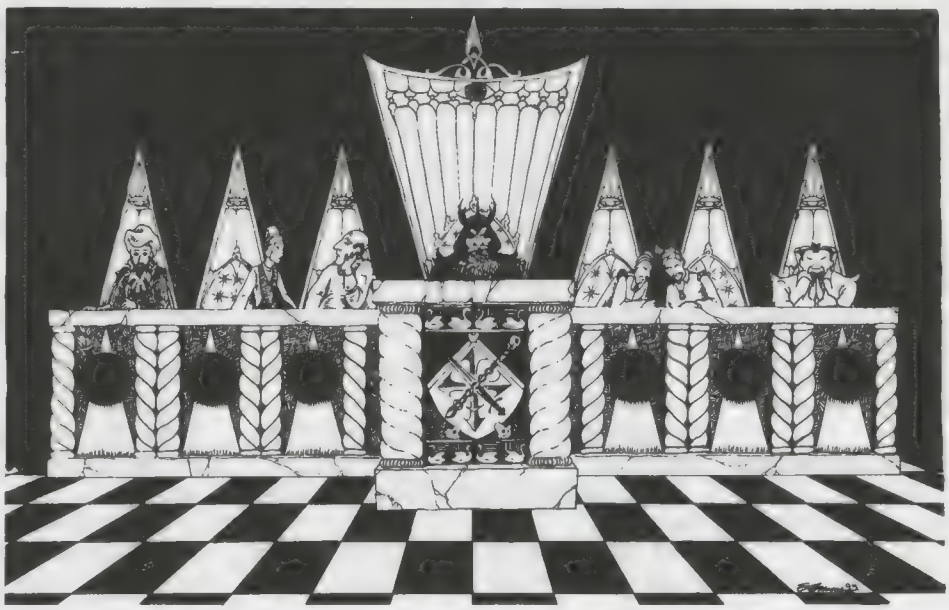
My father nodded. He was anxious to refer to his notes, and the judge would undoubtedly move the proceedings past the basic interview stage.

"Moreya," said the Judge, looking directly at me, "I would ask you to take the witness stand."

I had expected this, but now the moment had come I was nervous.

The jury looked at me. I could sense none of them had reached a conclusion in this case. I was, myself, confused.

The Crone of Lehena, one of my



Artwork by Stan Bruns

mother's oldest friends, smiled encouragingly at me, holding up the king's massive grimoire. I placed my left hand on it and recited the code of the enchanted court.

As I finished, I looked up at the two princesses. I could see fairies and goblins on the window sills. Since my learning, I'd come to see more and more of them, which pleased me. It proved I was seeing out of more than my human eye, I was seeing with my heart.

"Moreya," the judge was saying. "Which girl, say you, be the Princess Taja?"

"It's hard to say, Your Excellency. Initially, I thought it was the first girl and that the second was a clever conjurer who had somehow managed to duplicate the first girl's exact movements and questions. However — "

The burst of applause which greeted my statement showed me that a lot of people had agreed with this analysis.

"Silence!" shouted the judge. "Go on, Moreya."

It was then the idea came to me.

I had to proceed carefully. I didn't even look at my father for fear of telegraphing my plan to him. "Well, sir, I then began to think that perhaps it was the first girl who was an even more clever conjurer."

The shaman smiled at me. I could see it from the corner of my left eye.

"But sir, I do have a way of knowing which be the true princess," I said, my voice quavering.

The court erupted. The two princesses looked at me. I felt it, but did not look back at them. I tried to still my nerves. This had to work. I could make it work. I owed it to the future of a peaceful, prosperous kingdom.

My fingers worked nervously on the sash of the blue dress I had made on my return from the nunnery.

The judge waved his wand and darkness fell over the court, darkness like the dead of night.

The court became still.

With another wave, the light returned and the Judge spoke to me. "How?"

"Wait!" said the princesses in unison.

The judge looked down on them. "Well?" he said, sounding annoyed.

The second girl looked at me. "I think it's fair that we should decide how best we can be judged "

There was a firm agreement from the first girl. For a moment I looked at them, then caught the attention of a sprite waving to me.

When I caught the faint odor coming from the two princesses' garments, I realized the sprite was alerting me to the fact the conjurer had the other princess under her spell.

Artwork by Stan Bruns

I had to be very careful here.

Over the years I'd seen the real Taja perform wondrous feats of protective magic, and powerful banishing spells.

It would do no good to suggest each perform a spell. One would perform as well as the other. Then another thought occurred to me. There was a way. I just had to convince Taja it would work.

I heard the judge admonish the two princesses. I asked my guides to show me my best, most powerful ally in the room. I was not surprised when I opened my eyes and found myself looking directly at Oros, the shaman.

Oros nodded to me. At the same time, the seers from the twin cities held up joined hands. They were working to help me, too.

"Taja," I said aloud, "you have no need to fear me."

"I don't fear you," the princesses said in unison.

"The impostor does," I said, as sweetly as I could.

"I would like to say that this is all highly unorthodox," said a woman who emerged from the middle rows and identified herself as the Crone of Dimena.

"What have you started?" the judge asked me, but he said it in a good-natured tone.

"My good woman, this whole case is highly unorthodox," said the judge. "Have you something to say?"

"Yes," she said. "The second girl is the enchantress. I smell her garments from here."

"You could also be smelling the enchanted girl's garments," said the judge amiably. "It's hard to tell which garment produces this odor."

I glanced at my father. He could smell nothing. Others in the court began to sniff, too. Finally, the Crone of Dimena hobbled down the aisle to sniff both garments.

The Judge was right. It was hard to tell which produced the offensive odor.

Next the crone examined the girls' palms, then looked into their eyes. At length she said, "I've known the girl for some time and I cannot tell them apart."

"Then allow me," I said, loudly and clearly.

I saw my father's look of alarm. How dearly I loved him! How much I had missed him those years away from my

home.

Now was my chance to repay Taja's many sacrifices to me — the times she gave me portions of her food and helped me with my magic. Once smuggled me out of the nunnery when my father was very sick and I simply had to be with him.

Yes, I owed her a debt of gratitude. More than that, she had made it possible for me to be with my father. I could give her nothing less.

The crone began arguing with the judge, who patiently listened to what she had to say.

I ignored them as I tried to block the impostor's interference, which I could feel in the form of dizziness and a blinding headache.

I had much work to do in a very short space of time.

Slowly, I felt the blocks from the impostor shift away from me, further and further, like a baby uncurling its fingers away from mine.

I concentrated hard on Taja. I concentrated on good and positive thoughts, not negative ones.

In my mind, I returned to our childhood. The days in the nunnery gardens and its proliferation of wildflowers. Then there were the summer months in the rainforests where we would practice our enchantments.

There was so much about Taja that was unique. There was her sense of humor, her overriding loyalty and trust. Then there was also the matter of her left foot.

It had embarrassed her as a child. Later, she accepted it as a gift.

Not many people knew about it. But I did.

It had caused her shame once. Now it would rescue her.

I remembered the day I first saw her foot. To me it had been a miracle of existence. To Taja, it was the thing which made her mama cry when she saw it. To Taja's mother, the queen, it had been like having a deformed child.

The day after the queen died and the king went into mourning, several witch-nannies had been assigned the royal babies. They had marveled over the foot. To them, it was a clear sign of a great witch.

There was one witch to whom Taja was particularly close: the Crone of Dimena. The crone had treated it as a personal affront when two princesses arrived at the palace door.

I had waited with her to greet Taja, for I had arrived home two days before, spending that time with my parents.

My mother, who'd been allowed to visit me on special occasions in the nunnery, had smiled when I asked her how soon we could work together.

"Rest," she had said. "You have worked very hard for ten years and have learned much. Now, you must sleep."

Those first two days out of the nunnery had been difficult. There was no reason anymore to waken in the early morning. No animals to be fed, no gardens to tend.

I had rejoiced that Taja would return on the third day so that we might spend our time together.

With a speed unlike my usual plodding pace, I had hastened to the royal palace to greet the Crone of Dimena, who only that morning had seen the princess at the nunnery.

"She misses you," the crone had whispered.

"I miss her," I had whispered back.

For a long moment, the Crone had held my hand against her cheek. "You're like my other daughter," she had said. "You and Taja were always different from the others."

There had been two royal babies, Taja and her brother Mathias. He had died of fever at the age of three. When Taja and I were sent away to study, the crone was given other children of the king's relatives to raise. I knew none mattered as much to her as Taja.

Still, to me, she was always a woman of whom I knew little. That was where her secret lay. She was a powerful woman.

Now, as I looked at her, she seemed sad and lonely, as if she had lost Taja forever. Now was my chance. I had to save them both.

The judge conferred with the jury a moment, instructing them to keep their minds open to whatever happened next.

Albert, the wheelmaker, looked bored, but then he always did. However, Milo, the alchemist, was studying the two princesses intently.

Hana, the candlemaker, whom I knew briefly from purchases for the nunnery the last year or so, smiled at me.

My attention returned to the judge.

"Moreya," he said again, "how did you first come to know of the two princesses?"

"I was there when they arrived at the palace gates," I said.

"Please describe to me what you saw," he said.

I had told this story many times, but gladly recited it again. It would help formulate my plan to reveal the real Taja. "We were standing on the palace steps when we heard the carriage approaching," I said. "Then from the opposite direction, a second carriage appeared. The two carriages stopped beside each other. Then the two women emerged from the carriages and walked toward the gates. When they saw each other, they started to run."

"What was your initial reaction?"

"Surprise at first. Then I thought it was a joke. I thought Taja was fooling us, but both girls were frightened when we ran down to meet them."

"Which do you believe is the real Taja now?" he asked.

"I don't know, your Excellency. But I will in a few moments."

"You mean you can tell them apart?" said the judge.

"I can," I said.

"Moreya, are you sure?" my father's silent words intruded on my thoughts.

I sent back the message, "Yes."

"Be careful," came back another voice in my mind. It was Taja's.

"How can you do this?" the Judge asked.

"There are certain things I know about the real Princess no one else does," I answered. "Physical things."

"What things?" asked the judge.

"By looking at the feet of each Princess."

The Judge shot the wagging tongues in court a warning look before asking me gently, "Their feet?"

There was a small ripple of laughter but the sudden tension in both princesses put a stop to it.

"What is so remarkable about their feet?" he asked

"I'd rather not say, Your Excellency. Let me write it and pass the paper to you. The rightful heir to our kingdom has an unusual number of toes."

Oros, the shaman, was the first in the stampede to bring me a piece of paper.

I scribbled the words "She has six toes on her left foot," and folded the paper carefully several times before allowing the shaman to pass it to the judge.

Not a pin drop could be heard as the judge read the contents of my note aloud, nodded and ordered the shoes on each girl to be removed.

The second girl, who sat closest to me, had only five toes on each foot. The first girl had six on her left foot.

There was a gasp from the second girl.

The girl with five toes was quickly apprehended by two royal guards. "There, we have our impostor," the judge shouted. "Take her away!"

"No, Your Excellency," I said, "she is

not. This girl, the first witness, is the impostor."

The judge's jaw dropped. People were out of their seats, studying the bare royal feet. "What!?" said the judge. "But you –"

I interrupted him. "She has six toes. I wanted her to think that's what the real princess should have."

When I glanced at the impostor, she managed to look furious and shocked at the same time.

"You see, sir, I was right. She's very, very clever. She can read minds and has very persuasive powers. But she is not the princess — I think the shaman will verify that too."

All eyes turned to Oros.

"As Moreya hoped, at the exact moment the impostor performed the enchantment, I caught a glimpse of her true identity," he said.

He turned a writing tablet around so that we could all see what had consumed him so during the trial.

There, in rough red chalk, was a picture of an old crone. I'd never seen her before, but knew even before it was verified that this was the true face of the impostor.

Some people had seen her before, and knew her instantly as a long-banished sorceress from the kingdom.

She screamed as she was dragged away. Taja, tears and laughter in her eyes, hugged me as people around us cheered the successful outcome.

"My dear," said the judge, returning his powerful wand to its treasured container, "you are a credit to your parents."

"Thank you, sir," I said, and meant it.

I turned to my father, who looked as proud and pink as a father could be.

Taja gripped my hand as my father hugged me, then kissed my cheek before grinning at me.

"And to think," said Taja cheerfully, "there's only one of her!"

❧

FEONA MANNING is a first generation Australian writer of Greek descent living in Los Angeles. Her passions include deciphering medieval manuscripts, devouring Arthurian legend and Greek and Celtic mythology, and the novels of Margery Sharp and Mary Norton. Her heroine is Eloise.

STAN BRUNS traded in his business suit for an artist's smock in 1986 and hasn't looked back. He was fan artist guest of honor at Chattacon in 1990 and operates a gallery called the Arts Pavilion in his home state of Georgia.

Allison Fiona Hershey

Things Man Was Never Meant To Know

With an air of victory, Yondru the Sorcerer stepped boldly over the body of his fallen comrade and the carcass of the beast that had been guarding the chamber. The door slid open in front of him with ease and a quickly muttered spell. Yondru cast one last quick look at the noble warrior who had died defending the wizard, and a distasteful glance at the savage beast that lay quite dead on the ground...and then he giggled and ran into the room.

Inside, the chamber was a stark white. A table sat at the center, a book on the table. There wasn't even a chair. The room itself was lit by a strange, unseen source. Bravely, Yondru crouched before the book on the table. It was what the mercenaries he had hired had died for, and what *he* had been searching for. It was a treasure, a relic, a holy libram, and its title was *Things Man Was Never Meant to Know.*

Speedily, Yondru swept through the book, devouring each word with increasing hunger, barely comprehending it but knowing that later it would all come back to him.

At last, the wizard finished and closed the book with a mighty sigh. Then he shut his eyes and let himself think.

Yes! Yes! He could remember now, he could almost remember it all! Knowledge flooded his mind and he shrieked into the silence of the chamber: "Ha-ha! Now I am totally omniscient!"

But it was not his voice that was shrieking.

In fact, the voice that *was* cackling and gloating was, strangely, a high, sweet soprano. Very much like a woman's.

And Yondru/Yondrina felt the rest of the book's knowledge flood his/her mind.

Things that man really *was* never meant to know...

❧

STEPHANIE SHAVER is seventeen and has made six professional sales – all to Marion Zimmer Bradley and all while in high school. She lives in Southern California and somehow manages to squeeze writing into a schedule that includes school, two jobs, conventions, contributing to fanzines, and filking.

ALLISON FIONA HERSHEY lives in Southern California. She has done covers for computer software in addition to science fiction and fantasy publications.

by Stephanie Shaver

The Last Word

Hey! With this issue, we've made it to the advanced age of five! Even *Locus* is only five times as old as we are.

Bookstore names – we get (and still need) bookstore names: Our thanks to Frank Tuttle (the same Frank Tuttle who has a story in this issue) for sending us his local bookstore names, addresses (with zip codes), and phone numbers.

We're hoping for a table in the Small Press Room at the San Diego ComicCon this August – at least we should reach a new market!

Nomination News: The beautiful artwork for the cover on #19, Janny Wurts' original painting "Wizard of the Owls", has been nominated by ASFA members for a Chesley award as "best unpublished original artwork" for 1992.

Ron Walotsky, who did the cover for this issue, told me that his Hugo nomination as Best Professional Artist is his first ever, and he's thrilled. He told me, "I had been doing covers and other sf artwork for over twelve years before I even *knew* there were conventions; then Ed Ferman mentioned a WorldCon to me in a phone call. I went and had a very good time." Ron has also been nominated by ASFA for a Life Achievement Award.

I've been threatening for some time to give a $5.00 award out of my own pocket to the best-prepared manuscript each issue. Actually, of course, I'm too busy making corrections in PageMaker to even keep track of which ones cause me the least trouble, but this issue, I recall that Frank Tuttle's manuscript was quite clean and so was Isabel Cole's. The editors thank you. The copy editors thank you. My secretary thanks you.

At conventions, I'm sometimes put on a panel with a name like "Horrors from the Slush Pile" for which I save examples of bad cover letters, sentences with errors, choice misspellings, etc. If you have any favorite errors you'd like to send me, I'll be glad to add them to my collection. (And now you know where your story might go if I *don't* think it was well-prepared!) A recent favorite: "Her new apartment had a panasonic view of the Bay." If you submit stories and are interested in my comments, always ask for your manuscript back (rather than sending us a disposable manuscript). It's probably breaking editorial rules, but I tend to write on incoming ms. pages; if you want to *see* these comments (and have a thick skin – I take no time to be tactful, I'm afraid), you'll have to send a return envelope and postage. In addition to errors, I also collect examples of multilingual repetition: things like *the Los Angeles Angels* and *the green palo verde tree*. See, a good anecdote will do; you don't necessarily have to bribe an editor with chocolate...

The Future: Our next issue features a cover story by Tanya Huff – not one of her "Magdelene" stories but something completely new. We have an interview with Elizabeth Anne Scarborough in the works (I just finished her latest novel and am anxiously awaiting the one I heard her read from at NorWesCon), new stories from Shymala Dason (her tiger story was a Cauldron favorite), Dorothy Heydt, Barbara Rosen, and Cynthia McQuillin.

Conventions: Marion and I will both be at WesterCon in Bellevue, Washington, this July (see you at the Regency Dancing!). Later that month, Marion will attend Impact 3 in Omaha, Nebraska. And she is sponsoring next spring's Fantasy Worlds Festival in Berkeley next April. Misty Lackey and her husband, Larry Dixon, are the Guests of Honor for Fantasy Worlds Festival; other guests are Cynthia McQuillin, Diana L. Paxson, Dr. Jane Robinson, Elisabeth Waters, Deborah Wheeler, and Paul Edwin Zimmer. Write to P.O. Box 72, Berkeley, CA 94701 and enclose a stamped, addressed envelope if you'd like further information.

(And of course the staff will be out in force for ConFrancisco, since it's only a BART ride away from home.)

Cauldron voting: We say it so often it may sound meaningless, but we like any feedback you send us, especially the extra comments you add to your ballots.

–*Rachel E. Holmen* (R.Holmen on GEnie)

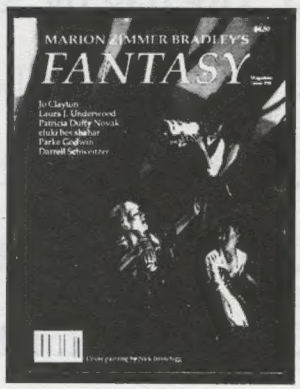
Is Adult Fantasy Just Plain Silly?

One of our biggest problems is persuading people that Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine* is for adults and yet is nothing to be ashamed of. Somehow the term "adult fantasy" has acquired a bad reputation. But we're not for children, particularly, though we do prefer to avoid strong language. And if we say our stories are about elves, dragons, and fairy princesses, people think we're silly.

Yet fantasy has been described as the fiction of moral choices, and every good story hinges on its characters' decisions between compelling alternatives.

Entertainment that's not mindless — this is our offer to you. Literate but not boring. A class act.

Subscription rates are $16.00 per year. Canadian subs are $24.00 (payable in U.S. funds); overseas subscriptions are $38.00. All subscriptions, including Canadian, are payable directly in U.S. funds only. Please make checks payable to Marion Zimmer Bradley.



❑ Yes, I'm enclosing payment for the next four issues. Start my new subscription with the current issue.

❑ I don't want to miss any back issues, so here's my order for them as well. Please send me issues:

❑ 1 ❑ 2 ❑ 3 ❑ 5 ❑ 6 ❑ 7 ❑ 8 ❑ 9 ❑ 10 ❑ 11
❑ 12 ❑ 13 ❑ 14 ❑ 15 ❑ 16 ❑ 17 ❑ 18 ❑ 19 ❑ 20

for $4.95 each plus $2.50 per order for postage. (Sorry; #4 is sold out.)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip _____

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY* Magazine Box 249, Berkeley CA 94701

The Cauldron — Issue #20

Story	Artist
❑ **Cannibal Sorcerer** by Evangeline Walton and Bruce D. Arthurs	❑ Ron Walotsky
❑ **Maiden, Are You Warm?** by Isabel Cole	❑ Alicia Austin
❑ **An Affair of Wizards** by Jon C. Crusoe	❑ George Barr
❑ **Fire Man** by Lynn Coulter	❑ Armand Cabrera
❑ **Trap-Tricker** by Julia S. Mandala	❑ Barb Armata
❑ **Daughter of the Blood** by Solange Wallace	❑ Frank Kelly Freas
❑ **Naming the Number** by Kevin F. Kerr	❑ Diana Harlan Stein
❑ **The Bag** by Sabina Pinto	❑ Michael Kucharski
❑ **Roses** by Deborah Burros	❑ Janet Kramer
❑ **Night Stand** by Frank Tuttle	❑ Vincent DiFate
❑ **The Basilisk** by Lucy Cohen Schmeidler	❑ Nicholas Jainschigg
❑ **Redemption** by Sean Erik Ponce	❑ Margaret Organ-Kean
❑ **The Two Princesses** by Feona Manning	❑ Stan Bruns
❑ **Things Man Was...** by Stephanie Shaver	❑ Allison Fiona Hershey

Vote for your favorite stories and artists, then send the ballot to:

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine*
P.O. Box 249
Berkeley, CA 94701

If you'd rather not tear out this page, a photocopy is fine, or just write your choices LEGIBLY and send us a letter. Mark 1 for first, 2 for second, etc.

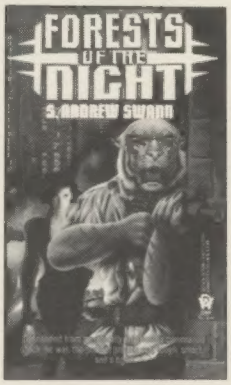
Want a subscription? An order blank is on page 63. A back issue order form is on page 31.

New from DAW Books!

FORESTS OF THE NIGHT by S. Andrew Swann

When Nohar Rajasthan, a private eye descended from genetically manipulated tiger stock, a moreau--a second-class humanoid citizen--is hired to look into a human's murder, he discovers a conspiracy that includes federal agents, drug runners, moreau gangs, and a deadly canine assassin. And he hasn't even met the real enemy yet!

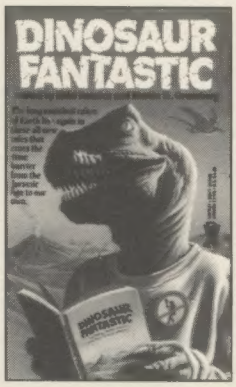
0-88677-565-5 SF/Original $3.99 ($4.99 in Canada) Jul. '93



DINOSAUR FANTASTIC edited by Mike Resnick and Martin H. Greenberg

The long-vanished rulers of Earth live again in these all-new tales that cross the time barrier from their native Jurassic landscape to your own backyard, from their ancient mastery of the planet to modern-day curiosities. Here are unforgettable tales, some poignant, some humorous, some offering answers to the greatest puzzle of prehistory.

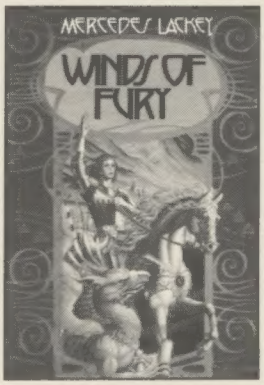
0-88677-566-3 Fantasy Anthology/Original $4.99 ($5.99 in Canada) Jul.'93



WINDS OF FURY (The Mage Winds #3) by Mercedes Lackey

Once again, Ancar of Hardorn threatens Valdemar, and this time he may well achieve his goal, for he has captured Falconsbane, the Dark Adept. With Valdemar's ancient magical protections finally breaking down, the kingdom may not long survive an enemy armed with spells it may be beyond their power to withstand.

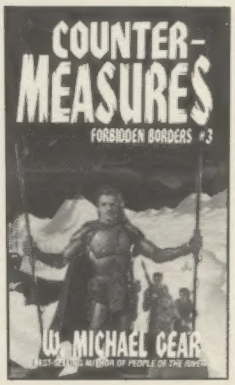
0-88677-562-0 Fantasy/Original Hardcover $20.00 ($25.99 in Canada) Aug. '93



COUNTERMEASURES (Forbidden Borders #3) by W. Michael Gear

Staffa kar Therma, Lord Commander of the Companions, is struggling to keep what remains of human civilization alive long enough to find a way to break free of the alien-created Forbidden Borders. But now, he faces his greatest danger yet--the Mag Comm, the alien-created computer which could make Staffa its unwilling slave--or free all humankind....

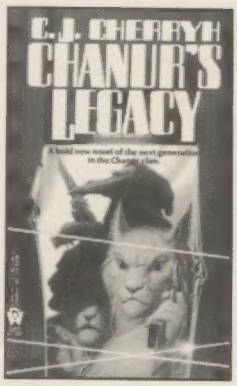
0-88677-564-7 SF/Original $5.99 ($6.99 in Canada) Aug. '93



CHANUR'S LEGACY by C.J. Cherryh

When Meetpoint's stationmaster offers Hilfy, captain of *Chanur's Legacy*, a million credits to transport a small, mysterious, "religious" object to Urtur Station, it seems like a golden opportunity. But as complications begin to unfold, Hilfy and the *Legacy* are caught in an ever-tightening web of intrigue and a deadly game of interstellar politics....

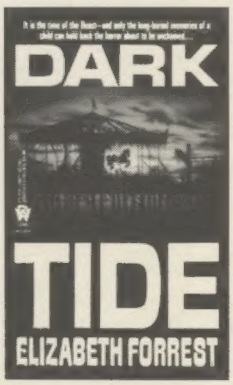
0-88677-569-0 SF/First Paperback $4.99 ($5.99 in Canada) Sep. '93



DARK TIDE by Elizabeth Forrest

In 1968, a freak accident at an amusement park saw three boys drowned, and the only survivor pulled from the ocean in a terror-fueled, near catatonic state. Years later, the survivor is forced to return to the town where it happened. And slowly, long buried memories start to resurface, and all his nightmares begin to come true.

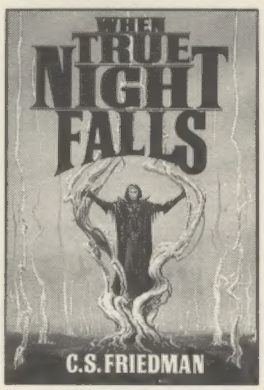
0-88677-560-4 Fiction/Original $4.99 ($5.99 in Canada) Sep. '93



WHEN TRUE NIGHT FALLS (Cold Fire #2) by C. S. Friedman

On the planet Erna, the demonic *fae* are increasing rapidly. Determined to seek out and destroy the source of the *fae's* ever-growing evil, Damien Vryce, the warrior priest, has renewed his dangerous alliance with Gerald Tarrant, the immortal sorcerer known as the Hunter, and together they will dare the treacherous crossing of the planet's greatest ocean to confront a power that threatens the very essence of the human spirit.

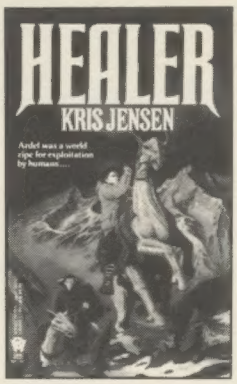
0-88677-569-8 Fantasy/Original Hardcover $22.00 ($27.99 in Canada) Oct.'93



HEALER (The Ardellans #3) by Kris Jensen

With plague decimating the native population, Terran Dr. Sinykin Inda answers a plea for help from the Ardellans, only to find himself thrust into a conflict between two Ardellan factions--those ready for the changes which humans offer, and those determined to drive every last human off Ardel, even if they must use long-forbidden and deadly powers to do so....

0-88677-570-1 SF/Original SF $4.99 ($5.99 in Canada) Oct. '93



DAW Books, Inc.

Publishers of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Since 1971

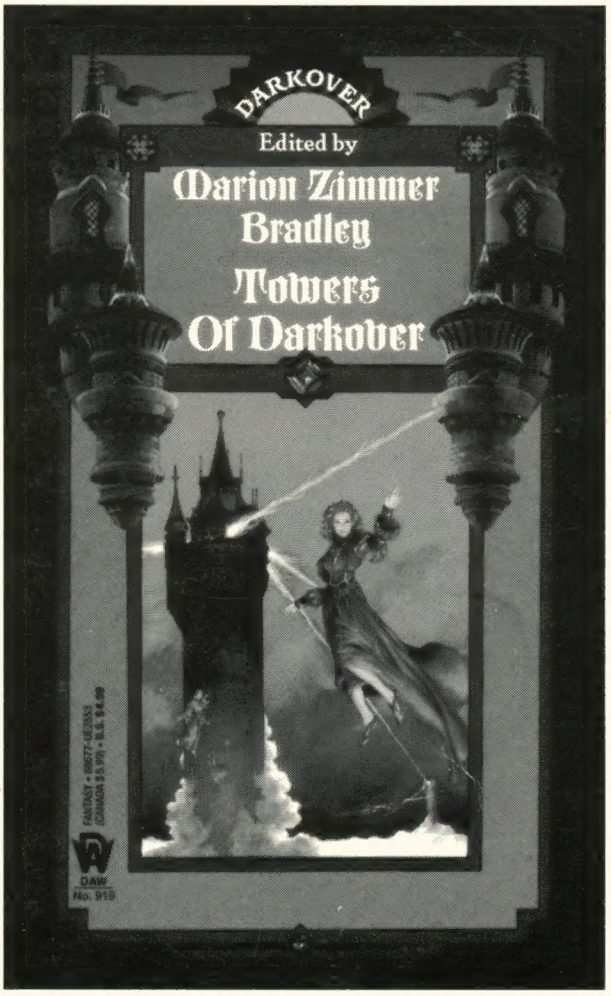
Distributed by PENGUIN USA

For our complete Catalog listing hundreds of DAW titles in print, please write:
Elsie B. Wollheim, DAW Books, Inc.
375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014

Coming in July 1993

TOWERS OF DARKOVER

EDITED BY
MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY



Return to the magnificent world of the Bloody Sun in this exciting new, all-original anthology that explores one of the most fascinating facets of Darkover society—the Towers. In these citadels, those gifted with *laran*—mind talents which enable them to communicate telepathically, to rule the elements, to control birds and beasts with their thoughts—join together to work the *laran* matrices, sometimes for the good of all, sometimes in a struggle over power beyond any ordinary mortal's imagining.... It is in these magically shielded strongholds that the mightiest of Darkover's telepaths are trained to master their mind talents—powers which, if uncontrolled, can cause catastrophe and death for themselves and their entire world....

From an apparently *laran*-less youth who discovers that his wild talent just doesn't function on Darkover...to a "washerwoman" who "cleans up" people...to a murderer from whom no one in the Overworld is safe...here are twenty spell-binding stories of power and wonder.

• Cover art by Richard Hescox

0-88677-553-1/ORIGINAL ANTHOLOGY
$4.99 ($5.99 in Canada)

DAW Books, Inc.

Publishers of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Since 1971

Distributed by
PENGUIN USA—MASS MARKET

For our complete Catalog listing hundreds of DAW titles in print, please write:

Elsie B. Wollheim
DAW Books, Inc.
375 Hudson Street
New York, NY 10014

DAW FANTASY